Polyhedron®

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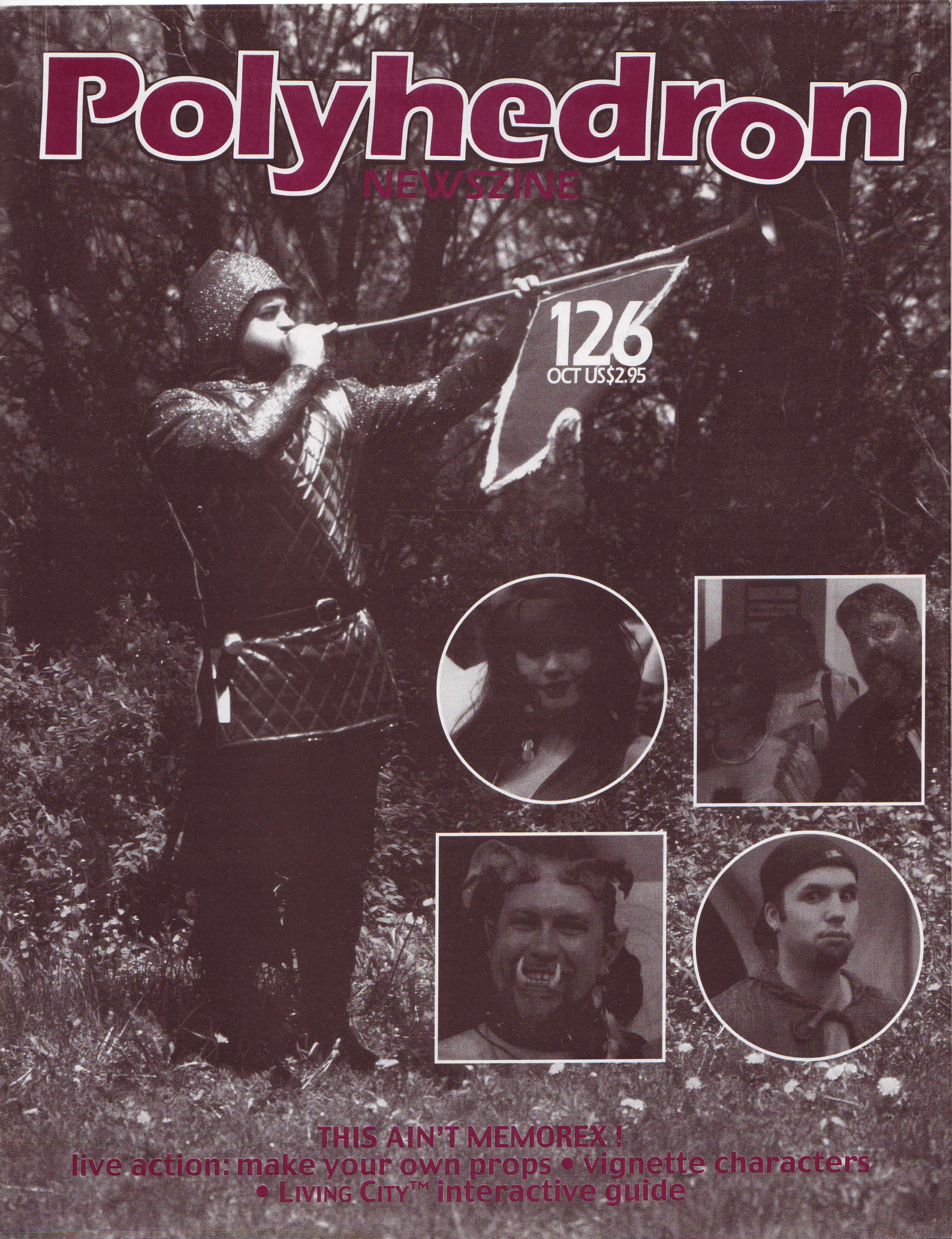

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Polyhedron® NEWSZINE

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Number 1
Issue 126
October 1997

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NOTES FROM HQ

Why Haven't I Gotten a Poly in . . . ?

Greetings, members. Since last we prepared a POLYHEDRON® Newszine, a lot has changed. And I mean a lot. I would like to explain what has transpired, because I believe you have a right to know.

The Newszine was placed on hold in November 1996 due to financial problems at TSR. Those same problems led, at the end of December, to TSR's decision to lay off a large number of staff persons. Among those were Scott Douglas, then Network Coordinator, and Jeff Quick, POLYHEDRON Editor. That left yours truly in charge of a Network full of uncertainty.

At this time, member Don Weatherbee stepped forward (as he always does) and worked with member Jae Walker to create a list of Network member email addresses, so that at least we could communicate with some of you. Through this agency, we dispensed news as we received it, along with discussions which took place on the Network forum on America Online. Since we didn't have the money to send out magazines, we couldn't send out a letter of explanation either, so we hoped that by word of mouth most of the membership would hear at least something of what was taking place.

In January, it was decided by TSR that the Newszine would be discontinued, and replaced with *DUNGEON® Adventures.* Membership rates changed, and we pressed on. The first *DUNGEON Adventures* that members would receive would be in May. Tournaments still took place, and people played games, and I sent out what news I could via the RPGANEWS email list. Don Weatherbee took over entering scoring packets, and the backlog started to go down.

In the middle of April, Wizards of the Coast stepped into the picture and entered into a deal to purchase TSR. That deal closed on June 2. Peter Adkison, CEO for WotC, immediately put priority on reestablishing the Network as a premier organization in the gaming hobby/industry, and assigned VP Lisa Stevens to work with me on accomplishing this. Lisa and I sat down and worked out a strategy to take the Network into the future, and set goals for the Game Fair and afterward. So far we have accomplished all of them.

One decision we came to early was that the Newszine is necessary to the membership as a communication vehicle and so much more. This issue is the first in our new bimonthly schedule, which will last until the membership rises enough to justify returning to a monthly distribution schedule. So, if you like the Newszine and want to see it monthly again, recruit lots of new members (GUILD-LEVEL™ ones, see below). With the return of the Newszine, we also see the return of Jeff Quick to his position as Editor. We are very happy to have Jeff back, and you can be sure that he will continue to work to make the Newszine as interesting and fun as possible.

Just after the Game Fair, TSR moved to Renton, and I probably will be done unpacking when you read this. So, the first big change is a new address:

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Jeff's email: polyhedron@wizards.com
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Web: www.tsrinc.com/rpga

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Membership Inquiries/
Customer Service: 206-624-0933
Fax: 425-226-3182

Second, we now have a Customer Service Department. Actually, we share the Customer Service Department with the rest of Wizards of the Coast, but we have one. Customer Service can handle address changes, upgrades or renewals to membership, questions about membership, and a host of things that we previously had a clerk for. So, if you have such a question, make use of them. They should be paid for something, after all.

New Things in the Works

As I look ahead I see some exciting times, and I want to share with you all what the future looks like from my perspective, that of the Network Coordinator. This is an exciting time for me to have this job, and I hope that together we can build the Network into a great organization that captures the best of the past while taking advantage of new resources and opportunities. As we move into the future, we may alter some of these ideas based on good member input or because they did not work as we had hoped. There are a number of changes, but these are advanced to simplify or streamline work, or to provide additional benefits.

New RPGA Mission Statement

To enfranchise TSR, Inc.'s base of loyal role-playing gamers by providing them with a high-quality gaming experience.

Every group must have a mission, and ours is to provide the best tournament gaming anywhere, and indeed the best gaming anywhere through programs designed to bring real benefit to members. Though our primary focus is on TSR consumers, we plan to include other game companies in our programs as much as possible, which means as much as they want to be involved. So please don't think we are leaving anyone out.

New Logo

New directions lead to new images, and thus we present our new Network logo. The color version looks even better. Check it out on the website. Though reminiscent of the old logo, which served us faithfully for more than 15 years, this new image helps propel us into the future. Thanks to Chris Rush, WotC graphic artist. Chris is well-known for his numerous pieces of Magic card art. He's done a pretty good job with our logo too.

New Membership Levels

The Network has adopted a two-tiered membership approach, as follows.

The basic FELLOWSHIP-LEVEL™ membership is FREE to any interested person.

FELLOWSHIP-LEVEL members can:

- Play or judge any sanctioned Network event, and receive points toward their ranking.
- Play in all LIVING™ campaign events, but cannot participate in campaign activities outside of tournament play, such as joining guilds, purchasing land, and so forth.
- Receive discounts on travel through Mutual Travel by giving their membership number, and can order flowers to be sent through Flowers USA and receive a 15% discount (call 800-225-3232 and give referral code B38).
- Access most of the RPGA® Network website, including file downloads.

The premium level of membership, called **GUILD-LEVEL™** membership, costs $20 per year, and includes the following benefits:

- All benefits of FELLOWSHIP-LEVEL membership.
- One-year subscription to POLYHEDRON Newszine (currently 6 issues).
- RPGA GUILD-LEVEL plastic membership card.
- Membership Handbook, telling you how to get involved.
- A unique AD&D® game adventure that is available only to GUILD-LEVEL members for the current year.
- The opportunity to playtest TSR product as part of a Network Club.
- The opportunity to become involved in meta-tournament aspects of LIVING™ campaigns (GUILD-LEVEL members can build their characters through extra activities conducted at interactives).
- The opportunity to contribute to the Newszine and to write tournament adventures for the Network (submissions by FELLOWSHIP-LEVEL members will not be considered).
- Access to the Chat and Message board areas on the RPGA Network website, as described below.

Conventions will be provided with membership application cards, which allow for instant registration of any new members at either level. These cards have preprinted numbers, so anyone can join at a game table and have a number with which to track points.

Because of this new structure, we have decided to eliminate the Family membership. With the new tiering, it is actually less expensive for your family to belong now if one member pays for a GUILD-LEVEL membership and the others take FELLOWSHIP-LEVEL memberships, and you suffer minimal loss in benefits. Existing Family memberships will be converted to one GUILD-LEVEL membership for the primary plan member, and FELLOWSHIP-LEVEL memberships for the other family members. Money will be pro-rated.

Change to Ranking System

The Network's player and judge ranking system now works on the principle of the AD&D game experience point system, in that the more points you acquire, the higher level you become. We would like to implement a couple of changes to this system, to make it more meaningful to the members.

First, we would like to move to a two-category ranking system for players. When the Network was started, there were only events with characters provided. Now, we have events where you bring your own character. These two types of events play very differently, and we would like to reward players based on the type of play they enjoy. The two categories are *Classic*, in which the character is provided for you, and *Campaign*, in which you bring a character that you created. We would track these points automatically, so you would not have to worry about which was which. You would receive ranking levels in both categories (depending on what you played), so you could have a Masters ranking in Classic and Grand Masters ranking in Campaign. Judge points would remain in one category, since judging does not vary as much as playing style between the two categories of events.

This type of system would allow us to offer a variety of tournaments targeted at specific player groups, such as a Campaign Grand Masters event in which only players with ranking of Grand Masters in Campaign (not Classic) would be allowed to play. Combined level events could also be offered, in which Grand Masters in either category allows you entry. These types of events would be up to the conventions to offer, but by encouraging more options we feel that we would be better serving the members, who have different tastes.

Second, we would like to implement an additional qualification for advancement. In the AD&D game, when a character has enough experience points to advance to the next level, he or she seeks training to better his or her skills. Our system has no element that guarantees that Master-level players (and judges) are better qualified than 1st-level players (and judges). They generally are, but our schema only guarantees that they are more experienced with Network events. We would like to require that a player's (or judge's) average performance at tables be above a threshold to advance to the next level set.

For example, to advance to Master-level player (in either category), your average points per table would have to indicate a placement of 3rd, which is to say that you placed 3rd or better most of the time. Once you made Master, then your average would be cleared and tracked from that point until you made Grand Masters. Ditto for Paragon. Judges would have to have an average that translated into about 140 points per table, out of 180. Judge averages would be cleared and tracked once a judge made Master level, and again at Grand Master level. If your point total qualified you for the next level set, but your average did not, you would continue to acquire points but remain at the lower level. This requirement will ensure that those who carry the title of Master or Grand Master or Paragon are truly worthy of the distinction.

Third, we would like to track Team event play over "seasons," and provide overall team rankings. Players and judges would get individual points for playing in a team event (we are moving to using only one scoring pack, and eliminating the pick team one), but the team could also be tracked by a Team identifier. The rankings would work like seedings, in which all the teams in a given competition would be seeded by season ranking. Points would be awarded for placement and bonus points would come into play for performing better (or worse) than your seeded position. We are still working out how to level the field with regard to the number of team events that are available to a team (which varies by region).

Fourth, and as a result of the first change, we would create a new category called Service, in which all Service points were collected. Service points would accumulate, and we would be able to reward those who serve in an easy manner, for example by making Service points able to be "cashed in" for something. Suggestions are welcome.

New Database

Yes, we are getting a new, better database. It is in development as you read this, with full rollout planned for November 1 or so. In the meantime, we hope to have the membership processing part working earlier. This new database will be web-accessible and will allow you to access information much more easily. From the website, you will be able to:

- Check your membership, change your address, and call up your tournament history.
- Find contact information for members who live near you (sorry, no phone numbers).
- See in calendar format which conventions are coming up that feature Network events.

- Track the play history of a given Network event.
- Check your Club's information, team season rankings, and Decathlon standings (yes, the database will be tracking the decathlon too).

On the staff end of things, we are adding a bunch of new functions as well, such as the ability to consolidate several membership numbers assigned to the same person.

GUILD-LEVEL Adventure

Each year, beginning at the GEN CON® Game Fair, we will produce a special adventure which is sent to GUILD-LEVEL members when they renew, or in the month of renewal if a membership extends over several years. These adventures are produced exactly like TSR products that you would purchase in the store, but are available exclusively to GUILD-LEVEL members for one year. This year's adventure, for the AD&D® game, is *Star of Kolhapur* by Mike Selinker. Next year's adventure is tentatively planned to be a collection of LIVING CITY™ events from among the first 20 tournaments.

Changes in the Tournament Program

We at HQ are working toward simplifying the tournament program "bureaucracy" and getting better tournaments into the market at the same time. Some of the changes we are advancing here will take some time to implement, but I want to show you where we are going and tell you why.

The major change in the works involves a new piece of software under development by member Michael Breslin, which will automate the request and mailing process to a large degree. Simply put, a convention organizer can go to our website, select "Order Tournaments," and walk through the process of choosing events (or having the computer choose them) based on where the events have played. Then payment by credit card is authorized and the request lands on my desk (well, my computer). After I approve it, the program collects PDF files of the tournaments, creates an archive, and emails that along with blurbs to the contact email address provided. Scoring packs and prizes follow by mail within the week.

When this is implemented, we will change the request deadline to ONE MONTH in advance (and maybe less) for conventions using library events only which are ordered via the web. Cool, huh? This would make the Network much more responsive to smaller conventions. Unfortunately, the deadline for event request sent through U.S. Mail would remain at four months in advance, and late fees would still apply. The deadline for all conventions using new submitted events would remain at six months in advance, though we would encourage use of the web-based ordering system. This system should be in place by the end of the year.

Starting with tournaments sanctioned for 1998, authors will be paid $100 per round, instead of $35 as we have been paying. With this comes an active effort to sanction the highest-quality events, which might result in a few more rejections. Convention organizers who submit events are encouraged to read the events to be submitted and help make sure they will pass muster.

We are contracting with member Don Weatherbee to process scoring packets, but will be working on incentives to encourage conventions to enter their own packets. Scoring packets are due within four weeks of the convention and should be mailed to Don; convention coordinators will be provided with the address.

Other Company Participation

The Network has always received strong support from game companies such as FASA Corp., Chaosium, and West End Games. Lately, White Wolf Games has come on board for tournaments as well. We hope to involve these companies, and all others, in greater depth throughout the Network's program structure. The level of participation is decided by the company, but we plan to offer product playtesting, greater access to the Newszine, entry into the Adventurer's Guild Retailer Program, and more. Look for updates in the coming months. Our commitment to a global support of role-playing, and not just TSR-based role-playing, remains undiminished.

Adventurer's Guild Retailer Program

With the cooperation of TSR creative services, we propose to launch a retail-level league play system in January 1998. Special tournaments would be provided to participating retail stores that are not available to conventions. These would be a combination of Classic events that premiere new TSR product, and retired Campaign events such as LIVING CITY events. A season of league play would last for six months, and the adventures would be staged for two-week intervals. Stores would be able to run two or four tournaments per month, depending on their desires. Points for league events would be accumulated (in the standard rankings), and those players who did well in the league seasons would be invited to special events at the GEN CON Game Fair or WINTER FANTASY™ convention.

WINTER FANTASY

The WINTER FANTASY convention is back in 1998. Andon Unlimited will be running the convention, and the Network staff will be planning our own program of events and seminars. This next convention kicks off our new efforts to train and perhaps certify Network judges, so make plans to attend. A judging signup form can be found on the mailer of this issue. We look forward to seeing you there.

Internet Activities

(www.tsrinc.com/rpga)

The move to the Wizards of the Coast website brings us several new capabilities which we plan to take advantage of. In addition to the tournament ordering system and membership database access previously described, we are introducing chat room and message boards to the website, and moving our AOL forum activities to the web. Look for the following:

- Late-breaking Network news and conventions info, plus links to convention webpages;
- Even more tournaments to download and use in your own campaign.
- All the latest on Living campaigns;
- Download a variety of Network information files;
- Chat rooms which allow members from across the country to meet and exchange ideas and comments about the Network, conventions and other important (and not-so-important) topics;
- Message boards which allow a quick and easy way to exchange ideas with fellow members;
- Seminars, training, and online gaming in the chat rooms, including the ever-popular LIVING CITY interactive chats; and
- Club activities, links to club websites, and decathlon tracking.

Chat rooms, message boards, seminars, and online games are available only to GUILD-LEVEL members.

We are looking into sanctioning for PBEM games and online games at other websites.

RPGA Product Line

In 1998, the Network will be producing four products for sale to the public. These products will bring us greater awareness in the market, and the revenue won't hurt either. Look for these in stores near you:

- February: *Moonlight Madness* by Skip and Penny Williams, 48-page AD&D adventure

(Continued on page 14)

The Border Kingdoms

Elminster's Everwinking Eye

High Emmerock

by Ed Greenwood

Somewhere among the flooded cottages, in a cellar or cavern, dwells the dreaded "Water Witch." Local legends insist she drags those who venture near her lair down to their watery dooms...

Once a sorceress of some beauty who dwelt in Calimshan, she was disfigured by a rival's curse. Her flesh now endlessly surges and crawls across her body.

These days, several towns make up High Emmerock, ruled by the seven Lords. All of them seem to disdain the everpresent threat of the "Water Witch." The seven Lords are listed below.

(Note that the title "Lord" is held by individuals of either gender.)

Haldimar Brethok (noble, dashing, gallant; LG hm F16), Lord of the Blue Falcon, dwells in Falconkeep, in the northwesternmost reach of the realm.

Interested travelers should know that Falconkeep stands over the small village of Irsprey, known for its smiths and woodcarvers. Its only tavern is the Old Anvil (Fair/Cheap) and its sole inn is Gunderbar's Place (Fair/Moderate).

Azlurla Marounal (quiet, grim, darkly beautiful; CG hf F14/W6) set aside war to learn magic from the Water Witch over a decade ago. As Lord of the Wavewatch, she dwells in Wavewatch Tower on a high peak overlooking the Lake of Steam, in the north of the realm.

Wavewatch Tower stands on Nightwind Pinnacle, above the village of Nightwind. Known for its sapphire miners and stonecutters, this spartan place boasts the Nightwind Tavern (Excellent/Moderate) and Stand of Stones Inn (Good/Moderate).

Gorramator Margan (mighty-thewed, rustic, gruff; LN hm F17), Lord of Oldstones, who dwells in Oldstones Hall, in the rocky northeastern corner of the realm.

Oldstones Hall overlooks a sheepherding village, Ornryl, known for its smelly but long-lasting tallow candles. Wool is sent to the mills of Catanthar. Ornryl has a small, rough watering hole, The Happy Homonculous (Good/Moderate), where ladies dance and sing for guests.

Lastos Teldoak (gluttonous, and lazy-seeming; LN hm F10), Lord of Eagles, delights in parties and spectacles, using them to sum up the characters of those around him. He dwells in palatial Reddunsar Manor (known for its shady gardens with streams and pools), atop the wooded Eaglesroost ridge, at the eastern edge of the realm.

The Eaglesroost, rising above the village of Catanthar, is the High Emmerock craftworkers' town. Carpenters, smiths, wool-millers, and cobblers all live here. The only settlement in High Emmerock with named streets, it boasts a pair of taverns and an inn. The Mace And Mattock (Good/Moderate) on Thurdan's Street is older, cleaner, and quieter; the boisterous drinkers go to the Just As I Was Falling (Fair/Cheap) on Iythkyn Street. The Enchantment of Emmerock Inn (Excellent/Expensive) on Shool Street, is quite exclusive, though still noisy.

Soarara "Longtresses" Phondipar (sharp-tongued, fun-loving, acrobatic; a slim golden-haired woman, NG hf F15), Lord of the Vale, dwells in Silverstream Hall in Boldo's Vale at the southeastern edge of the realm.

Boldo's Vale is heavily settled, with the oldest surviving homes in the realm. Its cottages are so bedecked with flowers and ornamental ponds and plantings that it is called "the Hidden Garden of the Border Kingdoms."

Amidst this pastoral beauty winds Engullar's Way, the road into the rest of the Border realms. Here, one finds all of the shops, cheesemakers, and other establishments of the Vale, including the popular Laughing King tavern and dining hall

(Excellent/Moderate), the Sylph and Stars festhall (visited by dancers and minstrels from all over the Border lands), and two inns: the Bright Buckle Beds (Good/Moderate) and the rustic Green Griffon (Good/Cheap).

Jethtarina Aldinuth, Hammer of Helm (soft-spoken, calm, never forgets details; a Bulwark of Helm; an outwardly colorless but inwardly passionate LN hm P16), is the Lord of the Tower of Vigil (monastery of Helm) at Harethtoe Tor on the southern edge of the realm.

The village of Harethtoe stands on the southern edge of High Emmerock, astride the road from Dunbridges. It is a no-nonsense trading center built for selling sapphires, smoked meats, and livestock to visiting merchants, while buying cloth and trade goods from them—all under the watchful eye of the Helmite clergy. Built for defense, it has concentric walls, defensible gates, slate roofs, wide streets, and stone construction. Nothing will readily burn, and attackers face a series of rising cobbled slopes while villagers fire crossbows down their throats.

Harethtoe has one tavern, Obolder's Tankard (Good/Expensive), and a single inn, the Southshield (Good/Expensive). Both are policed by Helmite priests, and are nearly crimeless.

Belotar Sandras (saturnine, sarcastic, a fashion plate; immersed in gossip and politics of the Lake of Steam, Tashalar, and Calimshan regions; CN hm F12), Lord of the Crag, dwells in Dragonmount Crag Castle, in the westernmost reach of the realm.

The village of Dragonmount lies just east of the Crag (topped by the Lord's castle), and is a place of woodcarvers, butchers, and shepherds, famous for its spiced smoked meats. It offers the visitor The Flying Unicorn tavern and festhall (Good/Moderate), and the Shanduth's Hall inn (Excellent/Moderate), popular with adventurers because its aged proprietress, Shanduth, was an adventurer in her day, and will provide advice, gear, aid, and discreet help in shadier dealings.

In the interior Sward, the visitor finds wells and covered pavilions for camp. No settlements are permitted; frequent patrols by the Lances prevent it, and mounted herders keep watch over the stock with various magical wands.

A small village, Argan's Leap, grew up south of the Lake In The Cleft after sapphires of unusual size and quality were found in the walls of the ravine. One day its delvers hewed too far; subterranean waters surged, flooding the mines and the village itself. Today, its cottages are little more than rings of stone under stagnant water.

The Water Witch

Somewhere among the flooded cottages, in a cellar or cavern, dwells the dreaded "Water Witch." Local legends insist she drags those who venture near her lair down to their watery dooms.

The Lords, and veteran Emmeran warriors, know better. To them, the tragic figure of Scsilda Starshield is revered. She is the source of the wands used by the herder commanders as well as secret *rods of giant whelming* that call forth and control imprisoned giants who once ruled the realm.

Once a sorceress of some beauty who dwelt in Calimshan, she was disfigured by a rival's curse. Her flesh now endlessly surges and crawls across her body.

At first, Scsilda hid and frantically tried to undo the curse. Her every effort met with failure. She tried many times to kill herself, being undone by her own fears or the kindness of local shepherds. Ultimately, she saw the curse as a means to achieving a strange state of lichdom. Her body does not rot or deteriorate, and she cannot be turned or disrupted.

Now, she lives beneath the waters. She has modified many spells, notably lightning magics, to do widespread damage to trespassers in the waters.

Many come anyway, partly because they deem the Water Witch easy prey. Another major reason is that the lake is (correctly) reputed to hide the main treasury of High Emmerock. The exact size of it is uncertain. But Elminster showed me an image of a stone coffer that held 5,000 gold pieces, and told me that he knows of at least 60 stone coffers of like size in the watery depths.

That amount of wealth should interest dragons, brigands, and rapacious rulers everywhere . . . so why isn't High Emmerock trampled under the rush of ambitious treasure seizers?

The answer is the lake itself. Scsilda has enchanted its waters so that they act against intruders. Neither her powers nor those of the lake are fully known, but she is thought to be a LN hf W19 (lich of unique status: unturnable), and the known powers of the waters of the lake follow.

Those in contact with the lake waters (even if a spell or magic keeps them from immersion) for more than three continuous rounds yields knowledge of their presence, race, and true alignment to Scsilda. If contact continues for 1 turn, the general nature and functions of any magical items they carry are revealed to her.

At any time, Scsilda can cause a water elemental or water weird (or up to three of each) to strike beings in contact with the water.

The Water Witch can also cause a *wall of fog* to rise from the lake and move at her bidding, along with extensive illusion magics under the waters.

Any being carrying memorized spells who remains in continuous contact with the waters for 6 hours or more will have the general nature of all of their spells (level and school or sphere) revealed to Scsilda. She can cause, at any time after 6 hours, a spell of her choice to be forgotten in the mind of an intruder. After the first is gone, she can remove another at any time beyond one hour after the first spell was lost, and so on.

Moreover, Scsilda can trace any being (distance, direction, plane, altitude, and determination of open air or enclosed space) whose skin or innards have come into contact with the lake waters in the last 24 hours, or 144 turns). Within the same time period, she can also cast a *suggestion* spell on any being who has drunk the waters.

In short, the Water Witch of High Emmerock is not to be crossed; she keeps her realm one of the safest in all the Border Kingdoms. ❑

LIVE ACTION

by Richard Dansky

As enjoyable as tabletop role-playing can be, there are times when you just want to do more. There are moments when you actually want to feel the weight of a sword in your hand as the chanting orc shock troops bear down on you. There are times when you want to actually corner the vampire who's been moving in on your turf in a deserted stairwell, and hear your warning to her echo down to silence. There are times . . .

Heck, let's face it: There are times when you just want to get out of the house.

Fortunately, there are ways to do that without leaving your role-playing habit behind. These days, there are literally scores of live action role-playing (LARP) and interactive games out there, and you can take your pick of subject material. There are games covering everything from classic fantasy role-playing to live-action variants on tabletop favorites like *Vampire* or *Wraith* to the wild and wacky games that one is likely to stumble across at any science fiction or role-playing convention. Whatever your taste in role-playing is, you'll find a live action game to suit your taste.

Before you go charging off into the night to find a LARP near you, however, there are some things to bear in mind. Just because a game is "live" doesn't mean that suddenly your character will be able to toss spells, walk through walls, or accurately detect sloping corridors. Instead, rules serve to simulate magical and other powers, and the shared illusion created by everyone's acceptance of these rules is what creates the basis for these games. **The second someone says, "What a stupid hand gesture," instead of "What effect does that power have?" is the second the shared illusion of the game ends.**

The LARPs that most people are familiar with are medieval/high fantasy games. Boasting real combat with padded weapons, these games allow for a sense of the rush that comes from hand-to-hand combat. You may tell war stories now about how your 14th-level paladin whumped all over a bunch of hobgoblins, but when it's actually you doing the whumping, you get a whole new thrill out of it. (On the other hand, the war stories that come from LARPs last a little longer. . . .)

Nor do spell users get shorted in this sort of game. There are a myriad of ways, from shouted instructions to lightly tossed beanbags, to imitate a wide spectrum of spell effects. Healing magic is often simulated by a "laying on of hands," while more offensive spells, like energy bolts or lightning, can be simulated by a small object tossed in the direction of the spell's target.

Most players at these sorts of LARPs create elaborate period costumes with swirling cloaks, intricately sewn dresses, and ornate suits of real (or mock) armor. Monsters are played by NPCs, often in full makeup and costume. Some monster costumes are so intricate and large that they can take as many as six NPCs to operate. (The author once got chased halfway across a camp by a 20-foot-long dragon.) As these games often last a weekend or even a full week, many people also take the time to decorate their cabins or tents so as to complete the fantasy illusion. Gargoyles, candles, tapestries, and more help move the game setting from a local state park to wherever the mythic land is that the action supposedly takes place.

Live action fantasy role-playing has been around for well over two decades. Groups range in size from giants like NERO (which has a national membership, intertwining plots and games that run all over the country) to brand new groups like Shattered Isles, created by former *Vampire* developer Jennifer Hartshorn. Usually games of this sort range from 20 to 100 people; many can boast of regulars who come back time and again to share experiences, stories, and the thrill of combat with old friends.

But many people ask, in this sort of game, how do you know if you've been hit? How do you tell if a spell affects you, or, more important, how do you tell if it affected that rampaging monstrosity thundering down the path?

The answer is role-playing. Just as you trust another player to report his

dice rolls honestly in a tabletop setting, you trust your opponent (even if he is decked out like an orc) to take a blow honestly if it lands. The same goes for spells, resistances, and that sort of thing. Generally, the system works. Everyone knows that the game is built on honesty, and few will risk that for the sake of one or two more swings against a kobold.

However, fantasy LARPs aren't the only LARPs out there. Among the oldest games are con-style games, which are derived from the games first created by the MIT Assassins' Guild. These games are done almost exclusively without props; cards represent everything from spaceships to Cthulhoid idols to .44 Magnums. Players are given character and background sheets, have the world and the rules (which often change from setting to setting—rules that work for a pulp setting don't make much sense in space opera) explained to them in briefings, and then just start. Often certain areas are designated "game" locations—one room is set aside as a tavern, another is designated as the spaceport, and so on—but the most important tool for this sort of role-playing is imagination. As these games cover genres from superhero to low fantasy to cyberpunk and beyond, the best thing you can bring is not a realistic-looking prop, but your creativity. The game is at its best when you can drop into your character and imagine that the hotel hallway you're skulking in is actually the belly of a megacorp's basement.

The latest wave in LARPs, however, belongs to the vampires and their ilk. Taking a cue from the *Mind's Eye Theatre* series, these games cast players in the roles of vampires, werewolves, and ghosts (not to mention the occasional, heavily outnumbered mortal) who must make their way in a world of intrigue, horror and lots and lots of black clothes.

These LARPs often exist in conjunction with the real world; coffeehouses, bars, and clubs provide perfect backdrops for vampiric intrigue or ghostly angst. The players of one game are so successful at integrating their action into the world around them that they've been playing at a popular mall for months—and the shoppers haven't noticed a thing.

Elaborate costuming is also common in these LARPs. Cloaks, silver jewelry, canes and top hats are common accessories for part-time vampires, and as each type (or "clan") of vampire has its own style, many players model their costumes after this unique look. On the other hand, as this sort of LARP is supposedly set in the more-or-less real world, no costuming is actually necessary to play.

As in convention-style games, there's no mock combat. Conflicts are resolved through role-playing and rules, rather than swinging padded swords. Game masters (called Storytellers and Narrators) wander through the action playing as NPCs, resolving disputes, and helping new characters come to grips with the game. Often games run all night (big surprise), and are continued over email, telephone conversations, and informal get-togethers.

The important thing to remember, however, is that live action games are still just games. A character played in a live game is no different from a character you play in a tabletop setting; you just might have to buy a tunic instead of some chips before the game starts. LARPers make sure to keep the line between in-game and out-of-game clearly drawn. That way, the game is as much fun as possible for everyone, without any confusion or out-of-game ruckus.

So go on and try a LARP. Get out of the house. Get a little sun (or a little moon, if you want to try being a vampire). Investigate something beyond the living room. After all, what's the point of dreaming it if you can't be it?

❑

TABLETOP

by Nicky Rea

Until recently, I had never heard the term "tabletop gaming." Before the advent of live action games, playing a character role while sitting around a table and rolling dice was just called "role-playing." Now LARPs are coming into their own and the old style is referred to (mostly by LARPers) as "tabletop gaming." While I enjoy both types, I'm most loyal to my first love, the sit-down style of role-playing. Though many folks play both types of games at home, my perspective here focuses on convention gaming.

Tabletop gaming enjoys several advantages, among them:

Fewer Players

Rarely hosting more than six to eight players at a given table, tabletopping making it easier for each person to be heard and receive attention from the other players and the GM. Characters are created specifically for that game; the scenario features situations the group is uniquely able to handle.

Live action features a cast of at least twenty and sometimes hundreds of players. Often, so many people want to play that subsidiary characters are created to fill demand. These are rarely an integral part of the story and become throwaways. Characters more involved in the story often ignore these outsiders, leaving their players floundering for hours trying to connect with others in the game.

Restricted Space

Being confined to a single table or room provides greater control for game masters. The GM is accessible to all the players to answer questions, run the game and judge character actions. She has ample opportunity to observe all the players, which lets her vote for the players who perform best.

Restricted movement or older gamers can sit comfortably during a tabletop game and not be left behind when the action moves. All players have a chance to interact, be heard, and witness the unfolding of the whole story.

In LARPs, the action can range through several rooms, hallways, and even outdoors. Referees cannot be everywhere at once, leaving players at the mercy of judgments rendered by other players —who may be tempted to be less than fair. Storytellers in LARPs tend to follow the main action and characters; players who can't keep up or whose characters are less powerful or incidental may be left by the wayside.

Characterization

In tabletop gaming, imagination is used in place of action. A gamer's physical characteristics are not as important—men take on female roles and women, male ones. The scrawniest may portray the brawniest without snide comments from the rest of the players. Further, players may act the roles of children, animals, or even magical items!

Such role switching is almost never in evidence during LARPs. Males play male characters; females play females. Physical type rather than acting ability or desire to try a new role often determines which part players are assigned. Thus, when casting roles for *Masquerade*, the vampire LARP from White Wolf, a person who wasn't overly attractive might get stuck playing a monstrous Nosferatu when what she really wanted to play was a beauty-loving Toreador. This shallow method (though with much historical precedent in the theatre) of choosing roles for players based on physiotype occurs far too often in LARPs, forcing undue restriction on them.

Another divergence lies in the concept of party unity. In tabletop play, the party works together to overcome obstacles and survive. In LARPs, the characters have conflicting goals or outright enmities; the main impetus of the game is character-versus-character interaction, intrigue and competition.

Time Constraints

Tabletop games last no more than four hours. This allows players to squeeze in more games in a day and ensures that personality conflicts between players or with the GM need not last beyond that single game.

LARPs may run for an entire weekend, with players checking in and assuming their roles whenever they feel like it. Since LARPs take a good deal of time and many occur in the wee hours of the morning, most participants have little time to play anything else. This also means that personality conflicts may continue for days rather than a few hours.

Stereotyping

Many tabletoppers see the black-clad, goth-punks who flock to LARPs and feel intimidated. LARPers feel equally nervous around "regular" gamers. There arises a sort of siege mentality where the LARPers assume an aloof attitude while the tabletoppers dismiss them as arrogant poseurs.

Despite the differences, LARPs have much to offer tabletop gamers, but those unused to LARPing should be prepared to work a little harder to maximize their enjoyment of live-action play. This can only happen when the stereotyping that occurs between the two groups gives way to an appreciation for each point of view and acceptance of

PERSPE

LARP

by Jackie Cassada

I was reluctant to play in my first LARP; only a skillful cajoler and close friend convinced me to try it, promising me that I wouldn't have to move any faster than a walk. In that first live-action experience, I played a dignified, politically manipulative character, wore lots of drapey black velvet and promenaded/talked my way through the entire game. Now I'm hooked, and my initial wariness has since developed into a genuine enthusiasm for the genre. Although I remain an avid "tabletop" gamer, I feel that LARPs provide an outlet for the imagination not readily available within the constraints of conventional gaming.

More Players

Because LARPs can accommodate many more players than tabletop games, players enjoy a greater freedom to play their characters, entertaining themselves and fellow LARPers—often without benefit of a gamemaster. LARPs usually have a central plotline, with a few subplots; even if you aren't part of the main scenario, you can still enjoy yourself by improvising your own story-within-a-story.

Unlike tabletop gaming, which focuses on six to eight player characters who interact with a host of NPCs (all played by the gamemaster), live action games vastly expand the limits of character interaction. It is impossible to have multiple simultaneous conversations with a gamemaster in a tabletop situation; actions that take place at the same time must still be resolved in sequence. LARPs provide methods for players to resolve their own challenges, even if a storyteller is unavailable.

More Room

The intimacy of a tabletop game can acquire a distinctly claustrophobic atmosphere if the chemistry among participants goes awry. In a live action game, personality clashes can be minimized by going elsewhere and finding something else to do with a different group of people. The extended environment of a LARP also makes private conversations easier and allows for more realistic changes of scene as the action moves about from place to place.

Characterization

While it is true that a player's appearance and gender often dictate character assignment in LARPs, this is not to say that typecasting never occurs in tabletop gaming. Often, gamemasters will automatically hand out female characters to female players unless a player specifically requests a cross-gender character. Some players even deliberately specialize in playing a certain type of character. ("Give me the dwarf!" "I want the wizard!")

Imagination plays just as big a part in live action characterization as in traditional games. A large dose of "attitude" and a touch of appropriate costuming can go a long way toward transforming even the most nondescript player into a lively, memorable character. While cross-gender casting rarely occurs in LARPs, most characters are flexible enough to be played as either male or female—simply by making a name change (from Justin to Justine or Alexandra to Alexander).

LARPs are not off-limits to people with physical restrictions or a preference for "sit-down" games. The secret lies in requesting a character that suits your style of physical gaming. Even those who prefer a sedentary style can participate in a LARP without doing more than walking briskly and talking a lot.

The restrictions on permissible actions in live action role-playing ensure that no physical combat (or simulations thereof) occur; conflicts are always resolved by some device such as "rock/paper/scissors" or tossing coins. This enables even the most nonphysically oriented people to participate in rousing battles without exercising more effort than they would rolling dice seated around a table.

More Time

Many tabletop games come to an end without finishing the planned scenario; four hours rarely provides enough time to investigate a mystery, save the realm, infiltrate the Underdark — and indulge in intensive role-playing. The longer hours allotted to LARPs give players the opportunity to explore many aspects of their characters without bringing the scenario to a grinding halt, as sometimes happens around the table when excessive role-playing sidetracks the storyline.

Although participating in a LARP requires a long-term commitment from a player, it is also easier to take a break from LARPing without missing vital elements of the game. Unlike tabletop gaming, live action games do not require constant participation. It is even possible to exit a live action game long enough to play a four-hour tabletop session, although doing so requires careful scheduling to avoid overextending yourself.

Stereotyping

Despite a reputation for aloofness, most LARP enthusiasts are eager to introduce new players to live-action role-playing. One of the most important lessons either type of role-playing teaches is that it is possible to look beyond the stereotypes and get inside someone very different from oneself—even if that someone is a "tabletop gamer." ❑

CTIVES

prop

"...let me put an urban myth to rest. LARPS are neither inherently dangerous nor difficult. The only part of LARPs that can be difficult is the props."

by Craig Walker

LARPing, otherwise known as Live Action Role-Playing, tends to generate two reactions. The first one being puzzlement, the other being concern. Puzzlement, because there is no easy way to duplicate a dragon being blasted by the fireball, or a tunnel taking a twist to the right and becoming a labyrinth; and concern because many people believe that LARPing entails grabbing metal swords, replica firearms, or other potentially harmful items and running about with all the potentially harmful mayhem that this could entail.

In this article, I specifically hope to allay the concern about using props in Live Action Role-playing.

To begin, let me put an urban myth to rest. LARPs are neither inherently dangerous nor difficult. The only part of LARPs that can be difficult is the props. Props are generally used to enhance a LARP and to give focus to particular actions and or characters. Writing this from an Australian perspective means that I have a view that is different from other parts of the world. Therefore, let me explain it from my perspective and then I will add the cautions for the other side of the planet.

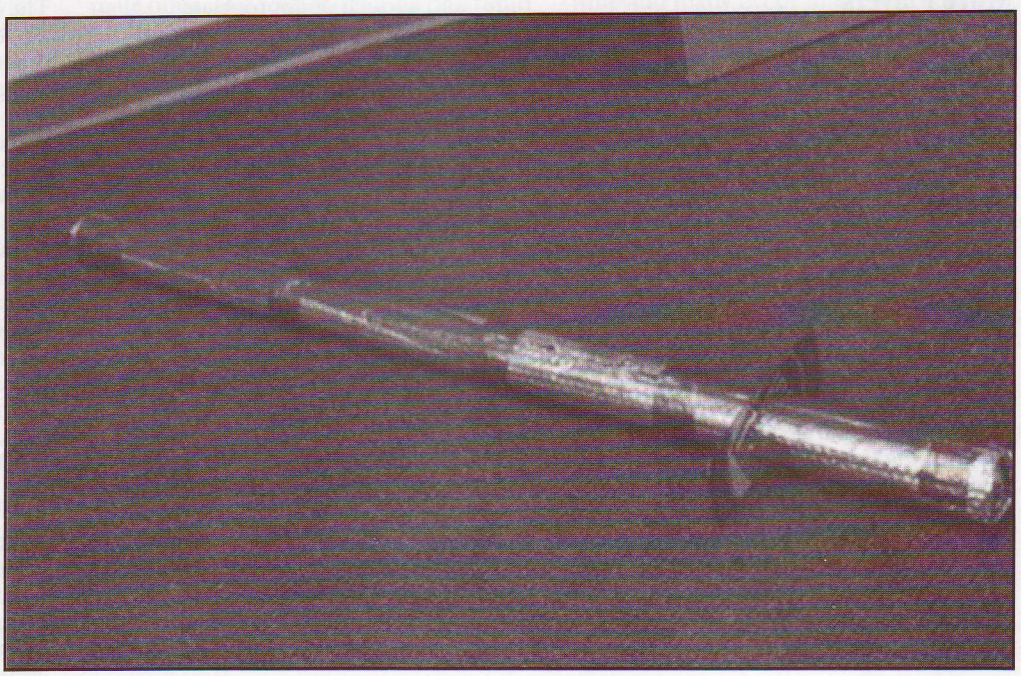
What common props are necessary for a LARP? Well, it generally depends on what the LARP is about. Let's assume that we are looking at a mixture of props, for a convention. I would suggest that the five most commonly used props in LARPs are the Sword, the Gun, the Cyberware, the Cane and the Backpack. We can add to this list later, and remember, that some prop items may be considered costume (such as hat and cloak) as well as props.

First, let's look at the Sword.

The Sword is perhaps the most versatile weapon-prop you can obtain for a LARP. Swords can be found in any time period from the Middle Ages to the far future. The construction of the Sword is dependent on what type of LARP you are in, but I have found two excellent options that will suffice for any LARP. First, there is the full combat sword and secondly, the ornamental sword. The full combat sword is the weapon with which you can attack another player and will not damage them. The ornamental Sword is simply one made for show and is NEVER used in a combat.

The construction of a full combat sword is simple and very cheap. You will need a piece of grey or silver closed-cell insulating foam about 4 feet long and 8 inches wide, duct tape (of the same color) and a piece of thick cardboard (for the quillions and/or guard). Simply roll the insulating foam until you get a roll that is the thickness of the sword that you want. If you wish you can trim the width of the foam so that you have a thinner "blade." For example, very thin for a rapier (or fencing sword), or thicker for a longsword. Then measure from one end either one or two hand-widths and mark a line. This will become your "grip" or handle. Next, cut the cardboard into the shape of the quillions (or guard) that you want. I suggest doing this in a few different designs. By doing this, you can have one Sword that will serve many different time periods and styles.

For example, cut an oval (with an hole in the center for the "blade") and you have a samurai sword. Two shallow V-shapes will give you a Scottish claymore. Fastening a strip of cardboard (or another strip of foam) from the "pommel" to the quillions will give you a simple hand-guard for cutlasses or Scottish dress swords. Obviously, as mentioned above, the color of the foam should be grey (or silver) and you can tape the "handle" with colored tape (and color the "guard") to give further realism to the piece.



This Sword can be used to attack another person and can also be used to stab at people with no danger to them. The foam collapses in on itself and will

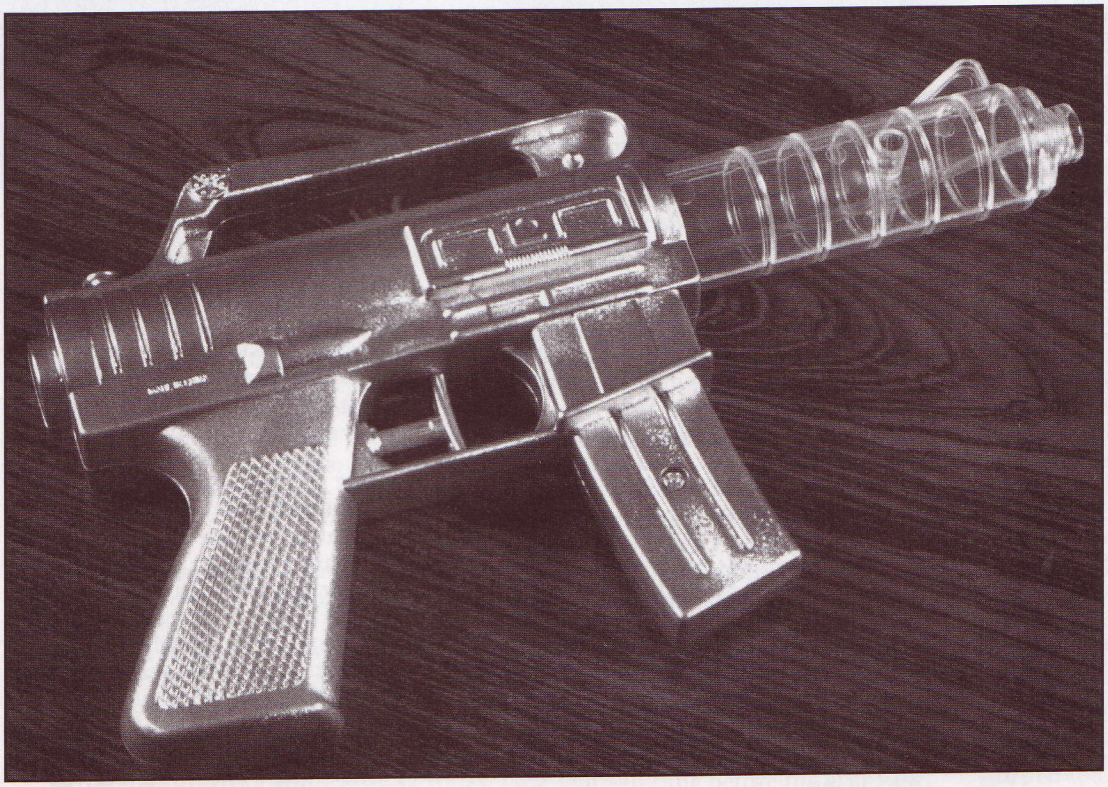
talk

5 easy props you can play with and not get arrested

mostly spring back, unless totally crushed. This makes the "sword" light, yet effective as a prop weapon.

For ornamental swords, I suggest using such materials as thin cane (or rattan) for rapiers, and simple balsa wood for any other blade. This is light, and when painted silver, does the job of an ornamental weapon.

Just a quick word regarding the Dagger: the sword construction methods are perfect for making daggers and knives. Shorten the foam from 3 feet to 12 inches, mark off the hand guard for sinister-handed use, and fix the "quillions" in place. Remember that the shorter the closed-cell foam is, the more rigid it becomes. Scrunch it in your fist (all the way up the "blade") before use. This will soften it greatly.



Now, let's look at the Gun.

First, a word of warning. Across the planet, law enforcement agencies have a simple rule of thumb. *If it looks like a gun, treat it as if it is a gun.* Whatever you do, DO NOT carry a prop firearm in public. At most conventions in Australia, we have a rule: weapons are not permitted unless they are a legitimate part of a game. This means that they are kept locked away until you enter the LARP/game area and then locked away after the LARP/game. They are not carried around the convention area and are only allowed out for the specific LARP/game, costume parades and/or times when the convention organizers deem it proper. Prop firearms are also subject to inspection by the Gamemasters and/or convention organizers if they so wish. Metal replicas (even realistic plastic ones) are generally not permitted unless they are property of the GMs and are only used by the GMs.

Now, onto the construction of a prop Gun. There are several different types of prop guns (obviously) already available at stores like Toys R Us. It really depends on what type of gun you wish to use or make—pistol, rifle, or shotgun. I generally suggest that you buy a water pistol and spray-paint it (that is what we do here in Australia). It has an excellent effect and is totally harmless (when used in the correct context). However, sometimes people may mistake these for the real thing and especially in the USA, we have to be very cautious.

To construct a Pistol, you need two cardboard toothpaste boxes (or something of that size). Cut one box in half and fasten the two halves side-by-side using either glue or some form of tape. (This means that you have a cardboard arrangement twice as thick, yet half as long as a toothpaste box.) Tear up some paper toweling and mix up some simple paste (flour and water paste works well and is quick drying—or grab some PVA from the local hardware store). Now mix in the paper towel scraps with the paste and start filling the insides of the boxes with the mixture, making sure that it is not too runny, as it has to dry to make the prop rigid. Once dry, either paint it black, or cover it in duct tape and you have a simple replica pistol.

You can also buy (from places like Toys R Us or some Bargain Import Stores) replica shotguns and rifles. However, these are generally made for young children and are too short to have the desired effect.

It is simple enough to make a replica shotgun or rifle. All you need are two

pieces of doweling (about 3 feet long) for a shotgun, or one piece of thin rattan or PVC tube (about 3 feet long) for a rifle and a triangle of wood in the rough shape of a "stock" or handle. (You can also use stiff cardboard for the "stock.") Cut the board into the shape of the "stock." For the shotgun, fix one piece of doweling to each side (side-by-side). For the rifle, fix the thin PVC tube/rattan to the top of the "stock" with some adhesive and allow to dry. You may want to use duct tape as well to ensure stability. Once dry, paint the required colors (black or grey) and you have a harmless prop gun.

Again, I must repeat, DO NOT carry these openly in public and ALWAYS inform convention organizers of any props that may be mistaken for the real item BEFORE you bring them to the con. It's their call as to whether a prop is allowed on-site.

The Cane/Staff

A Cane or Staff is one of the most versatile props possible because it can become many varied things. It can be a Gun, a Sword, a prop for injury/old age, it can even become a small opening in a wall, or the mouth of a cave. Most of these are self-explanatory, but the "opening in the wall" is the one that intrigues people the most. Simply put two chairs side by side. Leave enough space between them to put the Cane/Staff across the seats and you have an instant opening in a wall. Fasten a cloth to it, and it becomes a medieval standard for calling the troops or signifying the royalty; a sail on a small boat or a simple flag. The cane's versatility is strictly limited by the imagination.

The Backpack

As for the Cane, imagination is the key for using a backpack as a prop. Apart from a great way of carrying costumes and other props, it becomes a prop in its own right. It can be, well, a backpack. It can also become a rock, an explosive device, or a parachute, all without any alteration.

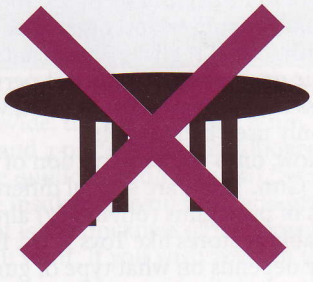
Cyberware

This is sometimes a tough call, because it ventures into the realm of costume. Simple cyberware ranges from cyberarms to eyes to datajacks. These can all be purchased for next to nothing.

An old pair of sunglasses can become effective as cybereyes, especially if you pop out the lenses (make sure they're plastic) and simply run a thin line of double-sided tape around the edge of the lenses and stick them your forehead, nose and cheeks. Double-sided tape is indispensable for other things such as attaching small wires or plugs to your face/body as well.

Arm-length, silver/gray spandex gloves work well as cyberarms and the same spandex (but in tights) can be used as cyberlegs. To add further realism, push a few wires through the lycra and run them outside the gloves/tights. Duct tape inside the gloves/tights where the wires poke in will stop you being jabbed by them and will stop the wires from coming loose during the LARP. Cyberware is also very much costuming, so I'll leave further discussion for another time.

Finally, I would like to add that a good LARP depends on a few things. A concept that will work, characters that can interact and have something to do, good GMs who can alter things on the fly (players NEVER do what you write) and players who have boundless imaginations. This same imagination can turn a Cane into that mystical dragon-slaying staff, or foam into a Sword, or two boxes into a Gun. ❑



Notes From HQ

(Continued from page 5)

- April: *Reunion* by Nicky Rea and Jackie Cassada, 32-page AL-QADIM® adventure
- September: *The City of Ravens Bluff* by Ed Greenwood and a huge number of RPGA members, 160-page FORGOTTEN REALMS® accessory
- December: *The Lost Shrine of Bundashatur* by Michael D. Wagner, 32-page AD&D adventure

Coming to your mailbox soon!

In the next couple of weeks you should receive a survey. Please take the time to complete and return it. We really want to build an accurate picture of what you, the Network members, want. We can only do that if lots of surveys come back. It won't cost you anything to send it, either—the postage is paid on the return.

In addition, all GUILD-LEVEL members (and you are one if you received this Newszine) will receive a new plastic membership card and a membership handbook a couple of weeks after that. Your special adventure will come with your renewal, or in the month of your renewal if your membership extends for several years.

That's all for now.

Robert

LIVING CITY™ INTERACTIVE guidelines

by Dan Donnelly

"The strange thing about life is you volunteer to do something new, do a halfway decent job, and suddenly you're an expert."

That is where I found myself regarding LIVING CITY™ interactive events. The idea of a LIVING CITY Bazaar or Row has been around for years, and since it is one of the most popular events each year at the GEN CON® Game Fair, we wanted to take an opportunity to open up the idea of LIVING CITY interactives to all conventions.

The role of the interactive event has changed a little from the early bazaars. No longer is it an opportunity to join organizations and compete against your fellow adventurers. Today it is a campaign focus, providing campaign events and activities that would occur during character "down time." Events occur during interactives that affect every LIVING CITY player. From a miniatures battle that might determine the outcome of the war, to the presentation of a new Deputy Mayor and Lord Speaker, the interactive has become a focus point of Ravens Bluff.

So what makes a good interactive? Interactives have to please everyone at the event. It's fine to have a murder/mystery puzzle to solve or an arena for warriors to fight NPCs (or each other); just remember that not everyone is a warrior and not every player likes a murder mystery. Not every LIVING CITY player likes to walk around "in character" so provide places where they can sit down and "play". One of the most important things to remember is that an interactive is still role-playing. It is an event to challenge characters, not players. Being "in character" is very important.

Creating a LIVING CITY interactive requires a lot of work, and I always suggest this be done by committee. I tried to design my first interactive myself and will never do that again. A committee approach helps validate ideas you have and generates additional ones. It also allows the responsibility to be shared during the actual running of the event. The most memorable part of any interactive is when the staff (great volunteers who never get the credit they deserve) stops calling your name and everything still runs smoothly. "Run Smoothly." What a concept. Nothing is ever that smooth; I have a short list of things to avoid to keep your interactive as smooth as possible, though.

☛ **Don't stage large "role-playing combats."** They will inevitably get out of hand. Keep combat to one or two rounds and under ten total people, or chaos will reign.

☛ **Think all mystery events through.** Some players are great mystery solvers and will solve things perhaps sooner than you wish. Look at all possibilities ahead of time and brief your staff on what to do. It is better to give up the mystery early than to disappoint quality role-players.

☛ **Publish starting and stopping times.** Give yourself time before the event and after the event to set up and clean up and make sure the staff and the attendees know. It is important not to start exactly at the start of a slot, because many of your staff will not be able to get to the event early enough.

☛ **Brief your staff.** The more they know, the better the event will go.

Now, what do you do in order to set up and sanction an interactive? Just think of the interactive as another module for your convention. An interactive submission guideline should be sent along with the Tournament Request Form to RPGA HQ. The guideline for the interactive needs to be in at least 6 months before the convention. Unlike tournaments, details do not need to be finished until 3 months before the convention. The guidelines will be approved and then the details reviewed and sanctioned by RPGA HQ just like any other official LIVING CITY event.

Here are interactive submission guidelines. The initial proposal should be broken into the following areas:

The Plot: This one- or two-paragraph section should detail the plot device used and details as to how the PCs are going to interact with the plot. If more than one plot is to be used, each one should be listed and explained.

The Locations: Which city locations will be included in the interactive, and what will be occurring at each location? Locations include such sites as temples, offices, shoppes, sewers, or any other city or campaign location. This is almost equivalent to the booths that will be set up.

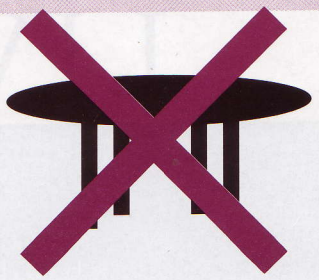
The NPCs: Which city officials, merchants, and other NPCs will be played or utilized at the interactive? Which new NPCs are going to be introduced? Also, any city branches that will be recruiting should be listed.

Possible XP: What is the base and maximum experience points that the PCs can earn? What will it take to earn this experience? This should be a very low number and awarded only for specific events.

Possible Magical Items: Send a complete list of all items that could be found or won. It should be rare for permanent items to be given out. An interactive is not the setting for acquiring items. It is, however, where rare or unusual items might be found or bartered for.

Fame/Chivalry/Infamy/Watch Advancement: If any special rewards are to be included in the interactive, list them and detail how the reward will be earned and how it is to be judged.

Other: This broad section is for anything else that would need to be approved. An example might be awarding a contest victor the title of Ravens Bluff Champion.



"When the new DRAGONLANCE®: FIFTH AGE™ game was taking shape, I stated that it would make a fine engine for an interactive-style game. As usual, my words come back to haunt me . . ."

. . . I need to stay away from periodical editors and Usenet newsgroups, I suppose. Jeff challenged me to put my keyboard where my mouth is, and show that the SAGA™ system can be the basis of a good interactive game. So, here goes:

SAGA Interactive Adventure Rules

These rules are most useful if you own the DRAGONLANCE: FIFTH AGE game. Although they can be used as a base for any interactive fantasy game (with possible expansion to other genres), the SAGA system is the rules foundation for the DRAGONLANCE game. The SAGA rules are available in the boxed set or can be had by purchasing a Fate Deck. This game is suitable for 3–6 players, including the Narrator.

Hero Creation

Creating a hero character generally takes place as described on pages 10–17 in the *Book of the Fifth Age*. Players, however, are encouraged to change the order in which the steps take place. If a player has his heart set on playing an elf, then the Narrator should permit him to decide that as the first step, and then assign cards accordingly.

If a player cannot meet the requisites for the race due to a poor draw, the Narrator can either let the player redraw, or raise requirements to their minimum.

The Narrator should not feel squeamish about letting the player raise or lower statistics or codes to the minimum requirements of the role. There are very few rules that should be slavishly adhered to in the SAGA Interactive game. One of them, however, is the rule that story and character takes precedence over all the rules.

However, narrators who are generous in the fashion described above need to be wary of abuse. A 3 of Hearts assigned to Spirit will exceed the base requirements for the Kender race, for example. The player who wishes to play a Kender mystic should assign it there, and then work on improving his hero's Spirit attribute through play, not put it in Nature or Demeanor and then try to get the Narrator to permit him to raise his 10X in Spirit to a 10C.

Creating Adventures

When inventing stories for the SAGA Interactive game, most of the general notes that appear in *Book of the Fifth Age* apply. The same is true when it comes to Narrating scenes. One thing Narrators of an Interactive game must consider, however, is the difficulty of encompassing large swaths of terrain and tremendous epic battles.

The best interactive games are small. The key word here is "interactive." A normal SAGA game revolves around characters and story, but the SAGA Interactive game must do so even more. The Narrator still controls the world's characters, but the heroes have a much more tangible presence. It's harder for heroes in interactive games to travel far (unless different parts of the house are designated as different parts of the world) and battles are harder to conduct.

Instead, the Narrator should try to center his adventures in one or two locations, making an evening's adventure basically one extended scene. Further, the adventures should be mystery- or puzzle-oriented, so the players have to engage their minds rather than resolving confrontation through combat. An example of what I would consider a suitable SAGA Interactive adventure would be something along these lines:

The heroes have journeyed to the tiny island of Elad's Hope, answering the summons of a powerful sorcerer. The message they received hinted that he

DragonLance®

LIVE THE SAGA

SAGA™ INTERACTIVE RULES

by Steve Miller

based on the SAGA Rules System by William W. Connors

had uncovered a powerful artifact that would lead to the doom of either the forces of Good or the forces of Evil. He intends to sell it to the highest bidder. (A hero with a Wealth score of at least 8 is needed, unless the heroes want to try to steal the item.)

The heroes arrive on the island as a storm is brewing. The wizard will reveal the nature of the artifact after dinner, but he is murdered before dinner can be served. It appears to be an accident, but when his apprentice also turns up dead, it should be clear that the heroes are trapped on a tiny island with a murderer.

There is at least one character on the island for every hero. The object is to interpret clues to identify the murderer, find the artifact, and figure out what it can do. (Of course, it might be that the whole artifact thing is a ruse. The sorcerer is still alive, and brought the heroes and characters together to make them think one is a killer, turn them against each other and then kill them all himself. He has no artifact, but wishes to eliminate the most powerful champions of the world's factions so he can take over.)

That is a simple and cliched adventure summary, but it illustrates the point that an adventure can be created without a lot of fights or location changes. The tension is still there—if the heroes don't find the murderer or the artifact, chances are they'll end up very dead.

Hero Actions

Hero actions are resolved as explained in the *Book of the Fifth Age*. However, the optional methods are very important in the interactive game because they provide a clear-cut way to resolve hero-versus-hero disputes, which are more likely to happen in an interactive game, due to the lessened interaction between players and Narrators.

Whenever Actions are taken, the auras of the cards must always be checked. When heroes are acting against other heroes, the aura serves as something of an initiative system. A white aura causes that player's action to happen before the other player's hero gets to perform a counter-action. Black auras mean the hero goes last, even if the other player used a red aura card for his hero's action. If the players played cards with the same aura, their actions resolve simultaneously.

Magic

The biggest difference between the SAGA Interactive game and the SAGA Dramatic Adventure game is the way magic works. Rather than using the spell point system of the dramatic adventure game, the interactive game views magic the same way it treats Actions. This change makes the interactive game a bit speedier than the dramatic adventure game when it comes to magic.

When a wizard wants to cast a spell, he has a base target number of 4. As the player describes the magical effect his hero character wishes to bring about, the Narrator can raise that target number. Characters and other heroes still get to resist the magic, if appropriate. (The Narrator can use the spell-building guidelines from the *Book of the Fifth Age* to determine what appropriate target numbers for a spell are.)

To have the hero cast a spell, the player plays a card and adds the value to his Reason or Spirit (depending on the kind of magic). If the value of the card plus the hero's attribute score exceeds the target number, less any resistance that might be offered by a target, the spell is successful.

Spell points also work a bit differently in the SAGA Interactive game. Again, this change is to minimize bookkeeping.

Heroes still determine their pool of spell points by squaring their Reason or Spirit score. However, instead of devoting spell points to building spells, they lose a set number of points for each spell they cast—the Reason or Spirit score subtracted from 12, with 10 being the maximum number subtracted. Powerful spellcasters become even more powerful under this system, while weaker casters will run out of points quickly.

Points can also be used to decrease the difficulty of a spell. For every spell point a hero burns off, he can reduce a target number by a difficulty of 1.

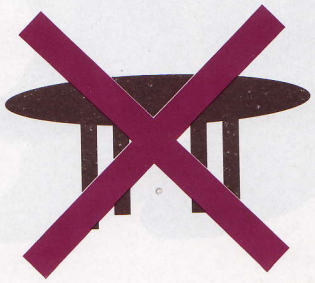
Monsters and Characters

These are created and run exactly as described in the basic game. However, if Narrators wish, they can apply the initiative system for heroes vs. heroes to major characters of his game, too. The Narrator would turn a card from the Fate deck to decide this.

Last Word

These rules are barely more than an outline. If you attempt to use them in a SAGA Interactive game, or even in the normal SAGA system, please let us know how it went. I've set up an email address exclusively for SAGA and FIFTH AGE comments at: Ergothian@aol.com. Any feedback you want to offer via the Internet should be directed there. The snail-mail address is the same as for POLYHEDRON; just put my name on the envelope.

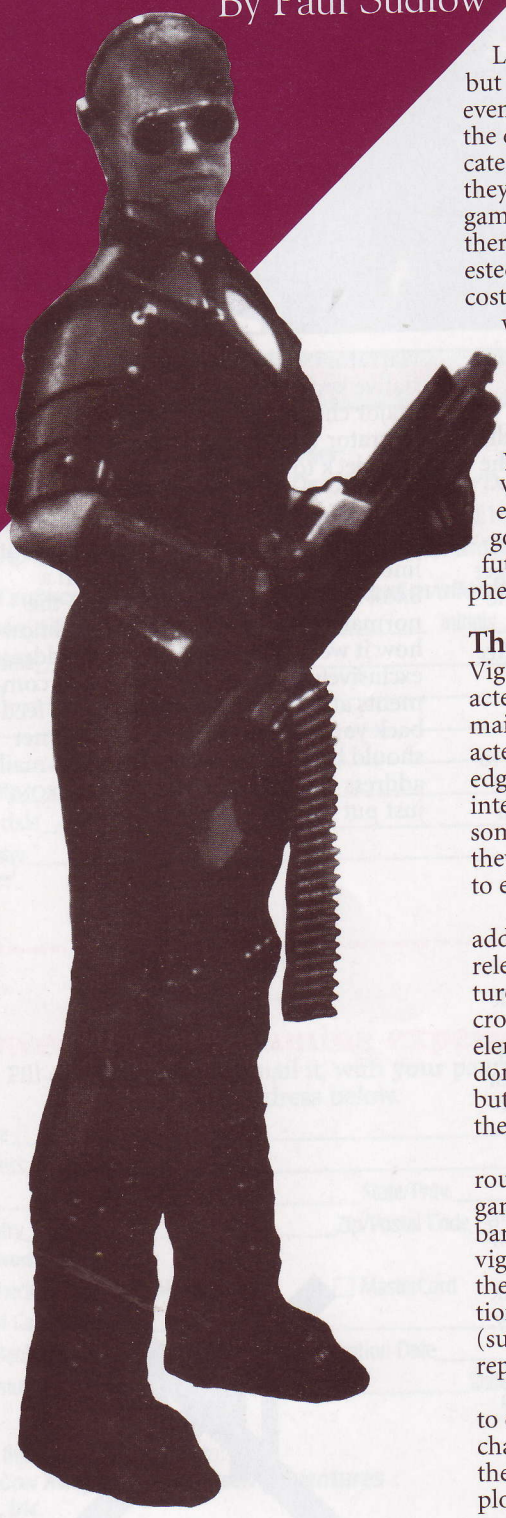
❑



Vignette Star Wars:

"Toss a few characters into the mix who don't have the slightest connection to the main plot, and watch players spend time and resources trying to figure out where they fit in."

By Paul Sudlow



Live action role-playing events at cons, and as independent productions, are growing in popularity every year. Unfortunately, they often require a significant time investment. Some LARP events last only a few hours, but many run much longer; eight-hour events are not unheard of. The length of the event is not a problem for the dedicated players who have come to LARP; they've set aside a big chunk of their gaming time for LARPing already. But there are always people casually interested in playing—perhaps drawn by the costumes or props—who aren't quite willing to set aside the time required to fully participate.

With a little advance work, you can involve these casually interested gamers without adding too much to your burden as gamemaster. The vignette character can give an interested gamer a taste of LARPing (a good way to acquire new LARPers for future events), and also add atmosphere to your settings.

The Vignette Character

Vignette characters are temporary characters who do not directly impact the main storyline. Using the vignette character, the casual player can dabble at the edge of the game for an hour or so, interact with other characters, and have some fun. And guess what? While they're doing that, they're also helping to enhance your event.

How? Think of them as extras who add atmosphere to your event. The re-release of *Star Wars: A New Hope* features new scenes of Mos Eisley with new crowds of merchants, citizens, and travelers passing before the camera. They don't have a thing to do with the plot, but they add atmosphere and texture to the Mos Eisley setting.

Likewise, vignette characters can round out and supplement your cast of gamemaster characters. Got a casino or bar scene that needs some extras? A few vignette characters can circulate among the main characters, strike up conversations, or play minor plot functions (such as a money changer or droid repairman).

You can even use vignette characters to confound your players. Toss a few characters into the mix who don't have the slightest connection to the main plot, and watch players spend time and resources trying to figure out where they fit in. Vignette characters also make good red herrings if you want them to play a more significant role in the storyline.

Sample Vignette Characters

Here are a few character ideas specifically for West End Games' *Star Wars: Live-Action Adventures*. Of course, you'll need to flesh them out and adapt them to your particular event, but the intention is to add atmosphere to certain locations. Some may also have semi-useful roles to play as well, depending on their professions and backgrounds. With a little adaptation, these character types can also be used in other game settings.

- **Imperial Inspector.** The stiff-necked guy who walks around asking to see papers. No telling who he might flush out during his patrol.

- **Pickpocket.** Every spaceport and crowded urban area has them. This guy has the potential to get very involved in an adventure if he steals an item important to the event, so be careful!

- **Squeak.** He bounces around one or more of the main characters being annoyingly enthusiastic: "Hey, wadda we gonna do now, huh, Tekk? We gonna blast some Imperials? Boy, you sure blast Imperials good, Tekk!" Squeak characters often die abrupt and gruesome deaths, but they are fun to play, especially if the main character Squeak adopts is trying to slink around quietly.

- **Town Drunk.** He's big, alien, and drunk. He may or may not join in any battle going on in his vicinity. He may also mistake a main character for a long-lost friend.

Vignette Scenarios

As described above, players playing vignette characters basically serve as character actors, protraying a certain personality type or fulfilling a noncritical job function. You can easily generate a number of character cards with guide-

Characters & Scenes for Live-Action Adventures

lines on role-playing these sorts of characters, and keep them on hand. When interested players show up during the event, hand them out and let them play the characters as long as they like (or as long as appropriate locations and settings are active, anyway).

But if you want to give the vignette players more to do, you can actually design scenarios for their characters. Vignette scenarios are mini-story arcs that move in and around the main story arcs of the event. Ideally, you shouldn't write them so that they will directly impact the main scenarios. After all, you can't be certain players will appear to take up these roles, and you may not want to give casual players an opportunity to affect the main storyline in a major way.

Keep vignettes simple, and design them for as few people as possible. You'll need at least two people for most vignettes to provide the necessary conflict (unless you want to tie the vignettes into the main storyline somehow), but you don't want to involve too many people. The more characters involved in a vignette scenario, the more people you'll have to round up before you can use it. It is probably better to design three or four vignettes for two players each than rely on one larger one. This will give you the flexibility you need to deal with the variable casual player turnout. You can design more complex vignettes customized to fit certain settings you will be using in your adventure, if you feel it is appropriate. For example, if your adventure is set in Bespin's Cloud City, you can use the various settings, characters, and situations inherent in Cloud City to design vignettes unique to that location.

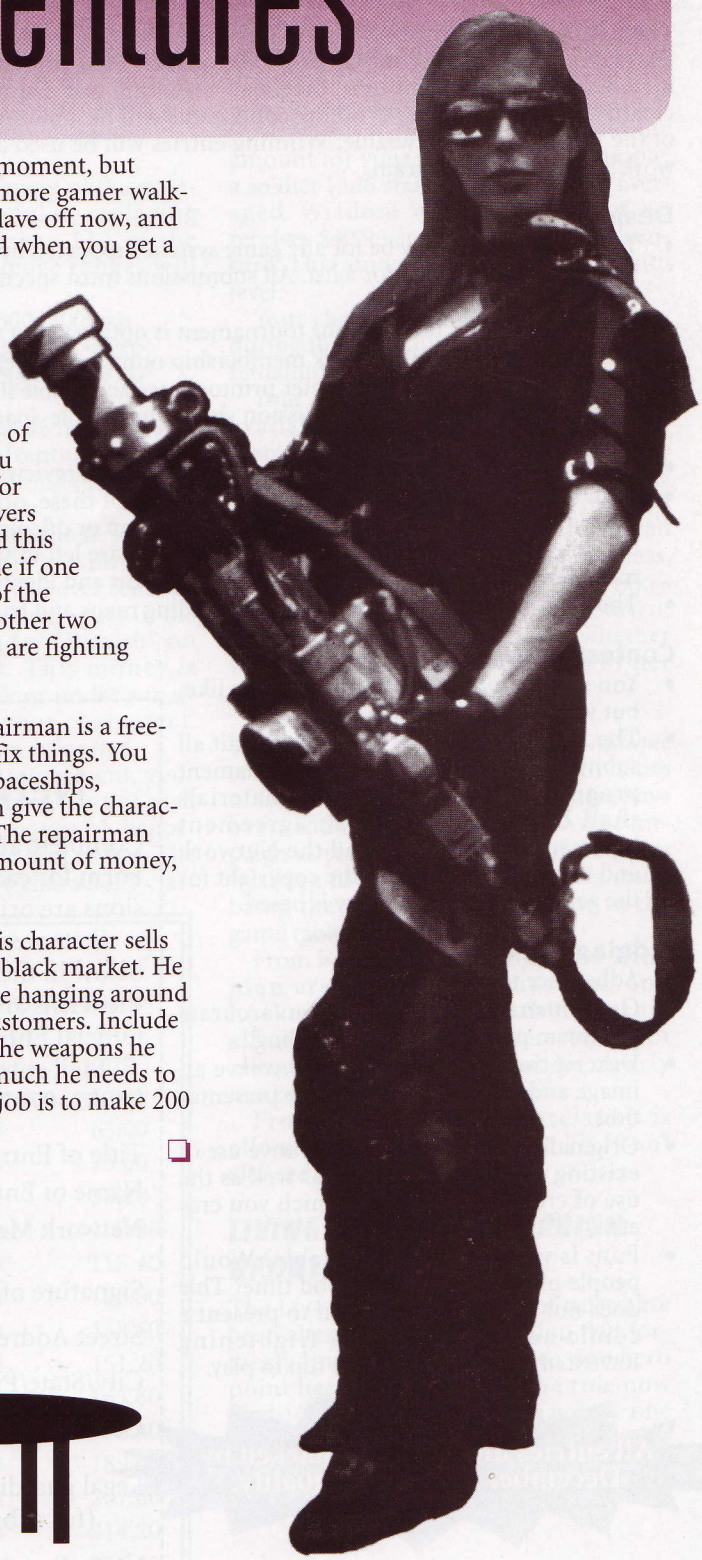
To get you started, here are a few ready-to-go vignette characters and scenarios:

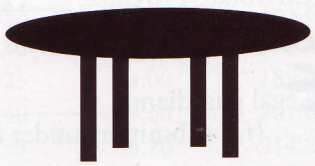
• **Escaped Slave.** A slave has escaped from a slaver. The slave must hide among the other characters (perhaps in disguise), long enough to find a protector. The slaver must recapture the slave. This is a good scenario to use if you only have one player at the moment, but anticipate at least one more gamer walking up later. Start the slave off now, and send in the slaver if and when you get a second vignette player.

• **Rivals.** Two nobles are spoiling for a duel. They just have to find seconds before they can start (i.e., two of your main players). You can invent the reason for the fight, or let the players decide. You can expand this scenario to three people if one of the three players is of the opposite sex from the other two (in this case the nobles are fighting over a lover).

• **Repairman.** The repairman is a freelancer who is eager to fix things. You decide what (droids, spaceships, blasters, etc.), and then give the character appropriate skills. The repairman must make a certain amount of money, maybe 500 credits.

• **Weapons Dealer.** This character sells illegal weapons on the black market. He spends most of his time hanging around cantinas waiting for customers. Include on the character card the weapons he has for sale, and how much he needs to sell to break even. His job is to make 200 credits above that. ❑





RPGA® Network Adventure Design Contest '97

Here's your chance to Win Fame And Prizes as a tournament author!

The RPGA Network proudly announces this year's Tournament Adventure Design Contest. Here's your chance to win fame and prizes! This contest is open only to Network members. Each contestant must design an adventure that displays his or her flexibility and creativity in game design. Winning contestants will be announced in the April 1998 issue of the POLYHEDRON® Newszine. Winning entries will be used as tournaments in the Network's tournament program.

WIN BIG!

1st Prize
$100 TSR, Inc. gift certificate, two-year renewal to the RPGA Network, and an engraved plaque

2nd Prize
$50 TSR, Inc. gift certificate, two-year renewal to the RPGA Network, and an engraved plaque

3rd Prize
$25 TSR, Inc. gift certificate, two-year renewal to the RPGA Network, and an engraved plaque

We may also award additional prizes for Honorable Mention!

Design Rules

- Your submissions may be for any game system supported by the Network's tournament program. Contact HQ for a list. All submissions must specify the level of characters for which they are intended.
- Submitting characters for your tournament is optional, but welcome.
- Write your name and Network membership number on every page of your entry.
- Entries must be typed. Computer printouts are acceptable if they can be read easily. Do not use fancy fonts. Each submission should be double-spaced and should have a one-inch margin on all sides.
- Submit two copies of your contest entry to aid judge reviews.
- Each submission must include six encounters. Of these, one must non-hostile, where the player characters negotiate; one must be a trap or dilemma; one must include a battle; one must be an obstacle; the remaining two are left to your discretion. Encounters may blend these elements, but all must be present and identifiable.
- The entry must not exceed 32 pages, including maps and handouts.

Contest Entries

- You may enter as many times as you like, but you can win only one prize.
- The Network reserves the right to edit all submisssions before use in the tournament program. No other use of the materials shall be made without an agreement between the author(s) and the Network and the company holding the copyright for the game on which the entry is based.

Judging Criteria

- Adherence to game rules.
- Good manuscript presentation: accurate grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
- Descriptive ability: the skill to weave an image and mood throughout the presentation.
- Originality: This includes innovative use of existing creatures and items as well as the use of creatures and items which you create.
- Fun: Is your scenario enjoyable? Would people playing this have a good time? This does not mean that you need to present a comic adventure. Even a frightening RAVENLOFT® adventure can be fun to play.

All entries must be postmarked by December 31, 1997 to qualify.

Official Entry Form
Network Invitational Design Contest

Complete and return a copy of this form and a Standard Disclosure Form for each entry. The entrant warrants to TSR, Inc., that all submissions are original and do not infringe upon the rights of third parties.

Statement of entry and agreement: I hereby enter the work described below in the 1997 RPGA Network Adventure Design Contest. I agree to the terms and conditions of this contest as set forth in the rules and this Official Entry Form.

Mail entries to: **RPGA Network, P. O. Box 707, Renton WA 98057–0707.**

Title of Entry: _____

Name of Entrant: _____

Network Membership Number: _____

Signature of Entrant: _____

Street Address: _____

City/State/Province: _____

Country, ZIP/Postal Code: _____

Legal guardian: _____
(for submitters under the age of 18)

Game System: _____

Dispel Confusion

Changes and Expansions for the Network's Living™ Campaigns

Sometimes, just occasionally, the Network's Living campaigns need a little fine-tuning, some adjustments, some . . . tweaking. Such tweaking is done for the betterment of the campaign, and not to make anyone suffer. You'll like these; they are expansions.

Living City™ Campaign Expansion: Procampur

That's right. We present the city of Procampur as an expansion area for adventuring in the Living City campaign. Native Procampan characters are slightly restricted in kits they may select, but otherwise use the same character creation rules as other Living City characters. Tournament adventures can take place in Procampur as well as Ravens Bluff.

Information on Procampur is available on the RPGA website, or you can order the Procampur packet from HQ for $5.

Living Death™ Campaign Update

In order for there to be a sense of continuity in a campaign, time needs to have some regularity. So, all new tournaments played in 1997 will occur during 1890 in Gothic Earth. January of 1998 will see the start of 1891 in Gothic Earth. And so on. The campaign and its various plots will reach a grand finale in 1899 (2006).

All tournaments that premiere in any one year will be available for play through April of the following. Then they will be retired. For example, first run tournaments from 1997 will be available for conventions that occur before June 1, 1998. Hopefully this will give everyone a chance to play in the tournaments.

There has been a refinement of the experience awards for modules, replacing what was stated in issue 112 of the Newszine. The experience ranges will now be as follows:

Low Level	500–2000 xp
Mid Level	2000–5000 xp
High Level	5000–8000 xp

Since monetary rewards are not a normal part of Living Death adventures, we present this alternative to going on treasure hunts (or robbing banks!):

Starting money remains the same; your character starts with the maximum for his or her class or kit. Whatever remains after equipment is purchased goes in the "Cached" column under "Wealth" on your character sheet. This money is assumed to be in a bank or under a mattress (depending on your character). Specify where this money is located.

At the start of each tournament, your character receives a set amount of cash which represents the amount of disposable income available to him or her. The amount is based on the character's class or kit and adjusted by the average of Wisdom and Charisma scores (rounded up). To determine how much cash your characters gets, consult the table below. The d6 of starting wealth is across the top, and the averaged attribute scores are in the first row. Cross-reference to find the amount for your character. For example, a soldier (3d6 starting money) with averaged Wisdom and Charisma of 13 receives $40.95 at the start of each adventure. This amount does not change with level.

Your character may spend this money during the adventure, and may cache any remaining at the end.

Your character's cached funds are only available if he or she is able to get to them. If they are in a large bank, he or she could wire for them from major cities (but probably not from the wilds of South America or small towns in the American West). If the funds are under a mattress, tough luck unless the adventure takes place in your character's hometown. DMs have discretion to decide whether your character could get to his or her money, and how long it will take.

Some kits have been added to the *Masque of the Red Death* material in recent issues of *Dragon® Magazine*. Some of these have been added to the Living Death campaign as player character options. Players wishing to use one of these kits must bring the appropriate magazine to the game table.

From issue 215, the **Scientist** and **Thespian** are allowed. The **baseball** and **hockey** versions of the **Athlete** kit are allowed, but the tennis version is not allowed. All benefits must be clearly marked on the character sheet.

From issue 236, the **Exorcist** kit is allowed, but the Enthusiast kit is not allowed.

Living Jungle™ Campaign Update

The Living Jungle Hero Point rules have been altered, and the restriction that formerly limited nonhumans to one hero point has been removed. The rule now reads: "A hero, of any race, may have one hero point per level." ❑

Living Death Adventure Wealth Table

Use this table to determine how much money your character gets at the start of adventures. Amounts in U.S. dollars.

Averaged Stat	1d6	2d6	3d6	4d6	6d6
4	1.4	5.60	12.60	22.40	50.40
5	1.75	7.00	15.75	28.00	63.00
6	2.10	8.40	18.90	33.60	75.60
7	2.45	9.80	22.05	39.20	88.20
8	2.80	11.20	25.20	44.80	100.80
9	3.15	12.60	28.35	50.40	113.40
10	3.50	14.00	31.50	56.00	126.00
11	3.85	15.40	34.65	61.60	138.60
12	4.20	16.80	37.80	67.20	151.20
13	4.55	18.20	40.95	72.80	163.80
14	4.90	19.60	44.10	78.40	176.40
15	5.25	21.00	47.25	84.00	189.00
16	5.60	22.40	50.40	89.60	201.60
17	5.95	23.80	53.55	95.20	214.20
18	6.30	25.20	56.70	100.80	226.80

LIVING CITY™ Campaign
Character Creation Guidelines

VERSION 2.0
MAY 1997

LIVING CITY tournaments are held at conventions throughout the world. RPGA® Network members play their own characters in these events. The more tournaments you play, the more levels, power, and wealth your character gains.

You are responsible for keeping a copy of your character and a list of all the items, wealth, and experience points earned during adventures. Characters receive items and experience points for participating in sanctioned Network tournaments and other LIVING CITY events such as sanctioned interactive games. No character can advance more than one level in a round of tournament play.

Any use of LIVING CITY tournaments without written Network approval is prohibited. Non-Network members are encouraged to try LIVING CITY events, but only members can advance their characters beyond first level.

All characters must fit the most recently printed AD&D® game rules and the LIVING CITY house rules presented here. If an optional rule or rule book is not listed here, it is not allowed. Occasionally, changes may be made that might affect your character. Such revisions are not made arbitrarily but with game balance in mind. Exceptions to the most recent version of these guidelines must be documented with official LIVING CITY certificates and/or a signed letter from RPGA Network Headquarters. Network HQ will serve as the final authority of rules for the LIVING CITY campaign.

Character Classes Available

- Warriors: Fighters, Rangers, and Paladins are allowable classes.
- Wizards: Wizards can be mages, specialist wizards, or elementalists (from the *Tome of Magic*).
- Priests: Clerics, druids, crusaders, monks, and specialty priests are allowable classes. Crusaders and monks are described in *Faiths & Avatars*. All priests must adhere to the rules outlined in the *Player's Handbook* or *Faiths & Avatars*. All priests use the experience level tables in the *Player's Handbook*.
- Rogues: Thieves and bards are permissible character classes. Bards must be human or half-elf and must comply with all rules listed in the *Player's Handbook*.

Races

The following races from the *Player's Handbook* are available for new characters: human, half-elf, elf (gray, high), halfling (hairfoot, tallfellow, stout), gnome, and dwarf. The race variants and racial kits detailed in the Complete Handbook series are not part of the LIVING CITY campaign.

Creating a Character

1. You have 84 points to assign to your character's Strength, Intelligence, Wisdom, Dexterity, Constitution, and Charisma. Regardless of race, initial ability scores cannot be lower than 6 or higher than 18. This limit can be exceeded only through the use of powerful magic. Characters who somehow achieve 19 intelligence do not gain immunity to first-level illusion spells.

Do not apply racial or age adjustments to your character's attributes; the character's statistics are "adjusted" when you assign your 84 points.

Warriors purchase an 18 strength with 18 points. They purchase one point of exceptional strength for the first ability point after 18, and 10 points of exceptional strength for each extra ability point spent, to a maximum of 18/00. For example, Sally's warrior character has an 18/01 Strength; it cost the warrior 19 attribute points (18+1=19). Strength of 18/91 would cost 28 points; an 18/00 would cost 29. If she doesn't spend any points for exceptional strength, her warrior has an 18, not an 18/01.

2. Your character begins at 1st level and must meet the required minimum statistic scores for his or her class listed in the *Player's Handbook*. For example, a bard must have a Dexterity of 12, Intelligence of 13, and Charisma of 15.

3. Select weapon and nonweapon proficiencies. LIVING CITY characters possess nonweapon proficiencies, but not secondary skills. Bonus nonweapon proficiencies for Intelligence are gained normally.

Languages are chosen as nonweapon proficiencies. PCs speak their native language for free. Nonhumans must buy "Speak Common." Nonhumans must buy their other languages from the list given under their racial descriptions. PCs cannot Read/Write any known language unless they spend the necessary proficiency slot.

Nonweapon proficiencies may be chosen from the following sources: *Player's Handbook, Complete Thief's Handbook, Complete Ranger's Handbook, Complete Paladin's Handbook*, and *Complete Bard's Handbook*. Unless a cost for crossover groups is specified, all proficiencies from Complete Handbooks are allowed only for the class to which the book pertains.

4. Choose an alignment. LIVING CITY player characters are limited to lawful good, neutral good, chaotic good, neutral, and lawful neutral. Druids must begin play as true neutral, and remain so throughout their career. Since rangers must be good, ranger/druids are not allowed.

5. Calculate hit points: LIVING CITY player characters have maximum hit points at 1st and 2nd levels. Hit points for high Constitution scores are added to this. For example, Sally's 2nd-level warrior with a 16 Constitution has 24 hit points. After 2nd level, a character receives half maximum hit points. Her warrior will have 31 hit points at 3rd level.

6. Characters begin with maximum gold pieces for their classes: 200 for a fighter, ranger, or paladin; 180 for a cleric or druid; 120 for a rogue; and 50 for a wizard.

Choose one nonstandard mundane item, such as a bag of marbles, a pouch of tobacco, or a cookbook. Valuable items such as traveling spell books are not considered mundane items.

Select a kit, if one is desired.

Choose spells. Mage spell books contain four first-level spells of your choice. Specialist wizards cannot have spells from an opposing school. Bard's spell books contain two first-level spells. Wizards add three spells to their spell books upon gaining a new level, and bards add two spells upon reaching a new level. These spells may be of any spell level that the PC can cast, so a 8th-level wizard can choose first- through fourth-level spells.

Retirement

When any character gains 13th level, or 1,125,000 total experience points (whichever comes first), the player must retire it from LIVING CITY tournament play.

Skills and Class Specifics

Players using kits, skills, and items from the Complete Handbook series are responsible for bringing those works to each tournament table for the judge's reference.

Warriors

Weapon specialization: Only single-class fighters (not rangers or paladins) may choose to utilize weapon specialization. Specialization is unavailable to multi- or dual-class fighters. No fighter may choose more than one weapon in which to specialize. Free weapon specializations granted by kits count as the character's one specialization. Double specialization is disallowed. All specialization must adhere to rules listed in the *Player's Handbook*.

Parrying, as described in the *Player's Handbook*, may be used.

Most weapons, equipment, and nonweapon proficiencies from the *Complete Fighter's Handbook* are allowed, but combat rules (including ambidexterity, weapon styles, and weapon group proficiencies), samurai weapons, firearms, and new armor types are specifically excluded.

Wizards

Wizard spells may be selected from the *Player's Handbook, Tome of Magic*, or the *FORGOTTEN REALMS® Adventures* book.

Metamagic, wild magic, and spells from the *Complete Wizard's Handbook* are not allowed.

Priests

Priests may worship any non-evil deity found in the FORGOTTEN REALMS boxed set or *Faiths & Avatars* book, but may not worship a "designed faith" from the *Complete Priest's Handbook* such as War, Agriculture, or Magic.

Specialty priests may select one of the following gods from *FORGOTTEN REALMS Adventures* or *Faiths & Avatars*: Azuth, Chauntea, Denier, Eldath, Gond, Helm, Ilmater, Lathander, Lliira, Mielikki, Milil, Mystra, Oghma, Selune, Silvanus, Sune, Tempus, Torm, Tymora, and Tyr. Specialty priests may choose to follow the class abilities given in either *FORGOTTEN REALMS Adventures* or *Faiths & Avatars*. In addition, all priests (not just specialty priests) of one of these named powers may use the spells given in *Faiths & Avatars*. Only priests of a certain god can use that god's spells; for example, only priests of Oghma can use the Oghma spells.

Demihuman specialty priests may select any non-evil elven, dwarven, gnomish, or halfling deity as it is presented in the *Monster Mythology* handbook. Such specialty priests must be of the race of the deity (half-elves are elves), and must adhere to the strictures and requirements listed in *Monster Mythology*.

Spells for clerics, druids, and specialty priests can be found in the *Player's Handbook, FORGOTTEN REALMS Adventures*, and *Faiths & Avatars*. All priests have minor access to *Tome of Magic* spells. *Combine* spells, quest and faith spells, and spells from the *Complete Priest's* and *Druid's Handbooks* are disallowed.

Material components are required for any wizard or priest spells normally expensive to cast.

New weapons from the *Complete Priest's Handbook* may be used (except nunchaku).

Barehanded Combat

The LIVING CITY campaign allows barehanded combat, using the unarmed combat rules from the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide* and the *Complete Fighter's Handbook*, including specialization in unarmed combat styles and martial arts. No other unarmed combat rules will be used.

House rule: No weapons may be used, no gloves worn, no items worn on the hand or carried in the hand that change the damage done may be used in barehanded combat. Items that change Strength without being worn on the hand can be used in barehanded combat: e.g., *girdles of giant strength*.

Unarmed combat specialization is available to all characters, but only single-classed (not multi- or dual-class) fighters or monks may specialize in more than one form as described on pages 77–78 of the *Complete Fighter's Handbook*. In addition, these characters may use continuing specialization. However, when such a specialist changes classes (as in dual-class) the character must henceforth abide by the restriction of the new class, even after the character exceeds the level of the first class.

Multi-Class and Dual-Class Characters

Multi-class characters are allowed as listed in the *Player's Handbook*. Multi-class characters may choose to be specialty priests, but they may not possess a kit, weapon specialization, or be a specialist wizard (except that gnomes may be multi-classed illusionists).

Becoming a dual-classed character costs experience points equal to half what it would take to reach 2nd level in the new profession. These experience points "buy" the new class.

For example, Steve has created a human fighter who seeks to become a wizard. It takes 2,500 experience points to be a 2nd-level wizard; therefore, Steve's fighter must spend 1,250 to buy the wizard class. The fighter spends the experience points, which are erased from his experience point total, and is now a 1st-level wizard. If the fighter began with an 18/51 Strength, he continues to possess that exceptional Strength. If the character had been begun as a wizard, no exceptional strength would be possible.

Dual-classed characters must follow the rules for dual-classing as given in the *Player's Handbook*, plus the house rules given here.

A character may acquire up to two classes in the LIVING CITY campaign, as long as the character has the ability scores. Alignment restrictions must be observed. Bards may never be dual-classed.

All experience points gained now apply to the new class. If your character uses skills, spells, nonweapon proficiencies, or other special abilities of his previous class, the experience point award for a particular adventure does not count.

Dual-classed characters can possess only one of the following: class kits, specialist magical abilities, or specialty priest abilities. A cutpurse (thief kit) who switches to illusionist loses the kit abilities possessed as a thief; such specialized skills atrophy.

Purchasing Equipment

PCs can purchase weapons, armor, supplies, and other materials at the prices listed in the *Player's Handbook*. These purchases should be made outside of tournament play, though certain tournaments might offer opportunities to purchase goods. Additional items may only be purchased from *FORGOTTEN REALMS Adventures, Arms and Equipment Guide*, and certain works in the Complete Handbook series (Fighter's, Thief's, Wizard's, Bard's, Ranger's, Paladin's, and Priest's). No other books contain items for purchase in the LIVING CITY campaign. Magic items are acquired only through tournament play and at special RPGA convention activities. Trading among PCs is welcome.

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Forces To Reckon With

Wayward Wizards

Tulrun of the Tent

by Eric L. Boyd

In the last issue, we detailed the history of the mysterious mage, Tulrun. This issue, we look more closely at his statistics, game use, and what would happen if your characters ran across him in the frozen North.

Tulrun
Human (Weretiger) Male
25th level Mage
STR: 17
DEX: 17
CON: 17
INT: 18
WIS: 11
CHA: 10
AC Normal: –3
AC Rear: 0
Base THAC0: 12
Hit Points: 81
Alignment: CN
Languages: Common, Auld Wyrmish, Dwarvish, Elvish, Giant, Orc, Weretiger
Age: 730
Height/Weight: 6'2"/200 lbs.
Hair/Eyes: red/blue
Weapon Proficiencies: dagger, dart, quarterstaff, sling, tiger claws
Nonweapon Proficiencies: herbalism (16), local history (The Moonlands) (10), reading/writing (Common, Dethek, Espruar) (19), spellcraft (16), tumbling (17)

Preferred Magical Items: *amulet of life protection, boots of the north, bracers of deflection, brooch of displacement, catstaff, cat's eye marble, cloak of displacement, girdle of lions, Mystra's [Boccob's] blessed book, ring of spell turning, ring of regeneration, wand of polymorphing (64 charges, "Mutate")*

Personality

Tulrun is naturally reclusive and cantankerous, although he exhibits periodic bouts of geniality. He retains the natural distrust of civilization from his barbarian heritage, but he truly loves the Art. Beneath his cantankerous exterior, the Tiger Mage nurses the heart of a lovelorn romantic. Tulrun is very leery of trusting others, and keeps a barrier between himself and many who would call him friend. The archmage has lost many friends over the years, and he cannot bear to lose another.

Among close friends (of which he rarely has more than one or two, if that many), Tulrun is quite talkative and personable. He enjoys strong mead, games of strategy, and hearty laughter. The archmage particularly enjoys rough-and-tumble weaponless combat and likes to challenge guests after a hearty meal to a wrestling match (he is rarely bested).

Interests & Objectives

Tulrun's primary interest and his first love is the Art. He has little interest in society outside of his ancestors' tribe and his adopted city, Silverymoon. While he cares about the fate of the goodly races in the North, he is more commonly consumed with personal struggles and only rarely acts on their behalf. Over the years, Tulrun has crossed paths with countless spellcasters and other powerful beings, and he angered many of them. His enemies are legion, and his friends can be counted on a single hand. As a result, Tulrun is regularly challenged by neophyte wizards and powerful monsters. In particular, Tulrun has acquired a reputation among white dragons for being a terrible foe of the race. Many wyrms of the icy north seek to cut their eye teeth on his throat.

For the past century, Tulrun has been consumed with tracking down his secretive enemy whom he believes to manipulate the white dragon, Arauthator. Towards this end he has dispatched an army of spies throughout the western realms seeking any sort of clue to the perpetrator. Tulrun has assumed the role of protector for the Red Tiger tribe, and works to ensure that their ancestral lands fall outside of the borders claimed by Luruar. In addition, Tulrun believes the rise of a nation centered on Silverymoon would be a positive development and works towards that objective.

Strategies & Tactics

In most situations, Tulrun favors spells that allow him to avoid direct confrontation. The reclusive archmage prefers to set two foes against each other rather than wade

into combat, fireballs exploding. A common tactic employed by the barbarian wizard is to cast a *monster summoning* incantation and then immediately depart by means of a *teleport* spell. In such situations, Tulrun usually teleports to the lair of a nearby monster in the region of commensurate power and involuntarily teleports it into the ongoing battle by means of a *teleport other* incantation (detailed in *DRAGON® Magazine* #220). The beholders of the Ruathym and Ice Mountains have grown tired of this tactic, but continue to unleash their fury at the archmage's forcible recruitment on Tulrun's foes. When his "hired guns" prevail, Tulrun typically returns them to their former location along with half of the monetary and magical loot of their fallen foe. Within the Cold Wood, Tulrun has been known to lure an opponent into one of the numerous glades which dot the forest. The archmage then casts a *freedom* spell to release a foe he imprisoned decades or even centuries earlier. Tulrun teleports away, scries the ongoing battle by means of a *clairaudience* spell, and returns to imprison the victor.

When he does battle directly, Tulrun cloaks himself in defensive incantations such as *stoneskin*, *Tulrun's tiger mantle*, and *ironguard*, and wades in. When fighting barbarians of other Uthgardt tribes, Tulrun employs spells such as *Tenser's transformation* and shapeshifts into the form of a gigantic snow cat. In combat with small groups of opponents, the archmage has long practiced his shapechanging skills, and can cast spells from a variety of forms that normally preclude spellcasting.

Although Tulrun is known to favor feline forms, few realize that the form of a tiger is a natural shape for the archmage. Against weaker foes, Tulrun considers it a point of honor to employ as wide a variety of forms as possible. The Company of the White Wolf is still fuming after being routed by Tulrun in the form of an al-mi'raj (horned rabbit).

Abode

Tulrun's semipermanent abode typically resides in the eastern reaches of the Cold Wood, due north of the city of Sundabar. Created by the archmage's personal spell, *Tulrun's tremendous tent*, the Tiger Mage's residence is a small, gaily colored silken tent nestled in a clump of gnarly oaks atop a stone platform supported by five stone legs.

Inside, the tent is much larger than it appears, and it is possible to wander its elegant corridors for hours and never see a familiar hall or chamber. The layout is also subject to change between visits to the archmage's home. Tulrun has created several libraries, reading rooms, studies, laboratories, summoning chambers, and practice halls in his extradimensional home. There are numerous bedchambers, privies, kitchens, dining halls, and lounges, as well as extensive baths. There is even an armory, drill room, and small hunting

them to Waterdeep. Uncomfortable at the thought of an extended foray amongst the bustling populace of the City of Splendors, Tulrun recruits the PCs to continue the investigation and hunt down the killers. ❑

Island Campaigns

Part 5: ecological nightmares

A World of Your Own

by Roger E. Moore

In space, weirder is better—or so says The Complete Spacefarer's Handbook. An AD&D® islands campaign set in wildspace thus demands the addition of unique elements: bizarre monsters, startling flora, strange societies, and everything else you don't normally meet outside the walls of your local city-state.

Last issue, we looked at Stephen's SPELLJAMMER® campaign, set in the Tears of Selûne near Toril, home of the FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign. This time, we look over Stephen's shoulder as he works out the ecologies of his Tears campaign.

As noted last issue, the Tears is a cluster of hundreds of small asteroids that trail the moon Selûne in its orbit around Toril. In the real world, wildlife from a continent often migrates to nearby islands. In the SPELLJAMMER campaign, thanks to the huge distances and hostile medium involved, wildlife will have to be brought in by spelljammers or through magical *gates*. It might be introduced deliberately (such as pigs brought for food, which then escape and run wild) or accidentally (such as giant rats in the cargo hold or parasites on the pigs).

Of course, wildlife in the Tears could be brought in from nearly any crystal sphere in existence, not merely Realmspace, although the Tears are probably visited most often by spelljammers from Toril. It is also possible that some forms of life originated in the Tears, created by one or more deities or magic-using beings. In short, the sky is the limit on flora and fauna.

Or is it? Because each Tear is only 10 miles diameter or less, a stable ecology on a Tear cannot support very large creatures. Anything over the size of a human is likely to run out of food and starve. Individual Tears are not likely to have exactly the same ecologies, either; each of the several dozen Tears with air envelopes could have markedly different encounter tables.

Also, since most visits to the Tears come from Toril, Toril's wildlife will likely be present in abundance—at least whatever wildlife survives best in this environment. (In short, expect to meet some giant rats.)

The key issue in determining a Tear's wildlife, Stephen decides, is noting which intelligent races live on or visit that Tear. An intelligent, spacefaring race will have enormous control over the ecology of its world, and undesirable predators probably became extinct long ago unless they found some way to escape or survive.

The various references cited in the previous article say that the Tears have been long inhabited by humans, beholder factions, elves, and other races. A dwarf citadel named Whitestone appears in the Tears in the *DUNGEON® Adventures* module, "Visitors from Above." The infamous Stardock asteroid (described in the third DUNGEON CRAWL™ adventure, *Stardock*) was visited by mind flayers from Glyth. After some research, Stephen comes up with lists of only some possible Tears inhabitants:

Intelligent spacefarers

From the 1989 SPELLJAMMER boxed set, 1993 FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign boxed set, *Realmspace*, and MC6 MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® Kara-Tur appendix: humans (particularly from Shou Lung, Wa, and Faerûn), gold and moon elves (particularly from the Imperial Fleet, Evermeet, or ancient Cormanthyr), drow elves, half-elves, shield and gold dwarves (from Faerûn), Faerûnian gnomes (illusionists command spelljammers), tinker gnomes, halflings, hengeyokai (from Shou Lung or Wa), dracons, giff, neogi (with slaves), mind flayers (from Glyth in *Realmspace* with slaves), beholder races and beholder-kin (from H'Catha in *Realmspace*), aarakocra and lizard men (from Coliar in *Realmspace*), and, of course, the arcane.

From MC7 MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM SPELLJAMMER Appendix #1: grommam, hadozee (with elves), lakshu, rastipedes (digging tunnels). Reiger and lakshu are less likely but still possible.

From MC9 MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM SPELLJAMMER Appendix #2: aperusa (almost certainly!), gravs, monitor (one only), scro, xixchil.

Stephen next looks at minor intelligent races and less intelligent wildlife. He knows that islands can have some very peculiar creatures, such as the dodos, moas, and Tasmanian wolves of Earth (all are now extinct). With this in mind, and assuming the Tears have accumulated weird creatures from all across the Known Spheres—particularly with the Rock of Bral drawing trade ships in—Stephen produces more lists.

Tribal folk, flora, and fauna

From the MONSTROUS MANUAL™ tome (brought in from Toril by spelljammers or *gates*): various small birds, fish, insects, arachnids, reptiles, and mammals, brain moles, brownies and killmoulis, carrion crawler, cave fisher (in tunnels), centipedes, dopplegangers (in human groups), dragonets, fungi (all sorts), galeb duhr, gith pirates, goblinoids, golems and other constructs, grell, gremlins, kenku, lurkers, mimics, molds, mongrelmen, mudmen, oozes /slimes/jellies/puddings, otyughs, small horses, carnivorous plants, ropers, rust monsters, sprites, stirges, troglodytes, undead (especially skeletons and zombie workers), xorn, yuan-ti.

From MC6 (brought by spelljammers from Shou Lung and Wa): bakemono, goblin rat, hannya, hu hsien, korobokuru, kuei, nat, p'oh, tengu.

From MC7: aartuk, albari, argos, beholder-kin, chattur, jammer leech, mortiss, rat (all types, from Toril and elsewhere), rock hopper, slinker, asteroid spider, symbiont, infinity vine (creating small, vine-covered asteroids), wryback, zard.

From MC9: alchemy plant, buzzjewel, contemplator, moon dragon (only one), fal, feesu, firebird, gossamer, gullion (lots of 'em), lhee, mercurial slime, space owl, silatic, skullbird, sleek, sluk, astrosphinx (maybe one), stargazer, starfly plant, yitsan, zurchin.

From MC14 MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM FIEND FOLIO® appendix: aballin, al-mi'raj ("space bunnies"), denzelian (carves tunnels in asteroids, creating homes for other creatures), gorbel, kharga, ruve, symbiotic jelly, zygraat.

From *Realmspace*: powderpuff, crispyleaf, and plainsjan (from Anadia).

Finally, the Tears might have some "asteroid imitators" among them, monsters that look like rocks or small Tears but are something else entirely. These are threats to spelljammers but would not often bother the ecosystems of other Tears.

"Asteroid imitators"

From MC7: astereater, gravislayer, space mimic, rogue moon, murderoid (small).

From MC9: bloodsac, gammaroid (maybe a dead one's shell), meteorspawn.

Putting it all together

Stephen can pick and choose when assembling encounter tables for a particular Tear, though he wants various elements to fit together. Following are examples showing how he can use the above information.

Long Block

Long Block is a rectangular Tear, five miles long, two miles wide, and one mile thick. It was a titanic, lifeless rock until some long-ago spelljammer or wizard dropped a few denzelians here, which tunneled through the rock for centuries. Long Block is now honeycombed with narrow tunnels. Many are lined with metal ores that the denzelians cannot digest.

The upper surface of Long Block became covered with various species of fungi and molds after a food-hauling spelljammer was abandoned here 200 years ago. Just under a century ago, a group of rastipedes settled here and began collecting and exporting metal to dwarves at Whitestone, who turn it into finished goods, and sell them to other groups in the Tears. Some of the fungi and molds are quite tasty to rastipedes.

Apparently out of spite, the neogi at Journey's Legg (their own fortified Tear) dropped a group of umber hulks on Long Block a decade ago. All were slain within a year, but rastipede losses were serious. The rastipedes now go out of their way to fire on neogi-style vessels, and their few ships carry extra weapons to attack any such craft they encounter.

Years of trade with other Tears have introduced minor pests to Long Block: chattur, stirges, al-mi'raj, ravens, sleeks, and "mere" rats and centipedes. The rastipedes put up with these critters, but they take drastic measures to kill rust monsters and other metal-eaters.

Nearly all the rastipedes live underground on Long Block. Entrances to the extensive tunnels are hidden and armored against invasion, with defensive weaponry hidden by magic or ground cover. From wildspace, Long Block looks fuzzy and colorful, thanks to the fungus and mold feeding on centuries of debris that once covered its surface. The rastipedes need to import water, however; eventually they hope to fill a great reservoir in the center of their worldlet, making them fully independent.

Next issue: A final look at the Tears.

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TOURNAMENT CHARACTERS: HOW TO WRITE 'EM...

Plot isn't everything! When you're writing a tournament for the RPGA® Network, one of the biggest things to think about are the characters. A good set of characters often takes as long to write as the whole rest of the module.

Since the difference between a great tournament and a mediocre one is the quality of the player characters, you won't want to make them an afterthought. In this article, we'll talk about four major themes to think about when you're writing your game and crafting your character: interactions, personality, logic, and completeness.

Interactions

Even if you've never been to a gaming convention, you've probably seen adventures published here in POLYHEDRON® Newszine. When you look at an example of one, you'll notice that below every character's description and personality is a section on how that character interacts with fellow adventurers. Character personality and interactions go hand in hand, but for me, interactions come first when writing characters.

When you start dreaming up PCs for your next adventure, start thinking right away about what they know and how they feel about each other. Two of the PCs might be brother and sister, or bitter rivals for the attention of a third PC. Other PCs might be best friends, in love, involved in a long-running argument, or loyal and trusted companions. Religious feuds and social prejudices between characters are also possible. Whatever their quirks, the goal is to make the PCs fit together well, making a believable group with no loner character, independent from the other PCs. If you have one PC with less interaction than the others, that one player will probably have less fun than the others at the table, and that's never ideal.

Imagination and creativity are the keys to creating exciting characters. Think carefully about obvious stereotypes, such as elf and dwarf rivalries. You also want to try to avoid boring interactions where there is no hook to role-playing. For example, the interaction between a party druid and party mage such as, "You've known Elena for a long time, and she doesn't like your pet animals," is not especially exciting.

A better interaction for Torth the druid might be: "You've known Elena for a long time. She loves animals, but pretends not to like them because she thinks caring for another creature shows weakness. She's so wrong! It's worth trying to change her mind and show her how wonderful your pet snake and cat and weasel and birds are, even when she becomes nervous and fakes a sneezing attack."

Likewise, the interaction from Elena the mage to Torth might be: "Torth loves nature more than people, and that makes him difficult to put up with. Pets are a liability to adventurers, and just get in the way. He always insists on shoving his pet animals in your face! You tell him you're allergic, but the next thing you know you wake up with his pet snake in your bedroll, cat hair on all of your spellbooks, and a stuffy nose from your allergies. He'll never learn that the only reason to take pets on an adventure is as a mobile food source."

Remember, characters don't have to like each other. In fact, some of the most exciting games I've played in involved PCs who didn't get along well. There is nothing more frustrating to a player than seeing an interaction that says, "Dorok the Weasel is a good-for-nothing thief whom you trust no further than you can throw him. But you don't mind working with him because he's a good team member." Characters like this are more common in tournaments than you would think.

A better interaction might be: "Dorok the Weasel is a good-for-nothing thief whom you trust no further than you can throw him. You can't stand to be in the same room as him. If you didn't need his permission to marry his sister, you'd have thrown him out of the adventuring group a long time ago."

Now, you have tension between three characters, with a good reason why their relationship doesn't break down into out-and-out brawling. A character who is passionate about his or her feelings is often a character that is fun to play.

Personality

Along with good interactions, the core of a strong character is personality. This section of the character sheet should describe how the character sees the world, and tells the player what quirks and characteristics his or her PC has. One mistake some authors make is to turn this section into a detailed character history of adventures. Actually, unless it relates directly to the current adventure, a detailed history is fairly useless to the player. The space is better spent describing how the character goes through life and what they think they're like. Some authors also include a sample quote or a one-line role-playing summary, such as "impetuous and outspoken, but tongue-tied around women you don't know."

Don't make the mistake of crafting a character with no weaknesses or personality flaws. PCs who have no problems are one-dimensional, and aren't as much fun to play. Any secrets a character has should be included in the personality section. Hopefully, they're secrets that provide a role-playing hook to help make the PC come alive.

When you create a priest character, always put a brief summary of the god's religion and beliefs into this section. When a player is in a tournament playing a dwarf priest of U'Laa, and it doesn't say anywhere on the character sheet who U'Laa is, the player is in trouble. However, if you write that U'Laa is the god of Earth, the player has the opportunity to play up the holiness of dirt and refuse to heal anyone who is clean. A religious description helps, and can add quite a bit to a character's depth.

If you are writing a multi-round tournament, remember to make copies of the characters for each round and change them to reflect what has happened already. They may age, lose or gain magic items, or begin injured in later rounds. Doing this adds realism and helps players keep track of items found in the previous rounds.

When you've finished interactions and personalities for all six characters,

read them all carefully and make sure they match. Having five other character interactions say that your PC sneezes continuously, and never having it mentioned on your own character sheet, is easily avoidable and shouldn't happen!

This is also a good time to ask yourself if you would enjoy playing each character. If the answer is no, then you might have one or more weak characters who need to be tweaked and improved. If you're happy with your work and think every PC will be fun to play, move on to the details.

Logic

Once you have personality and interactions worked out for all six PCs, it's time to rough out details such as appearance, ability scores, saving throws, combat statistics and information, proficiencies, and belongings. After you do, go back and take a look at the character with a critical eye. Do the statistics and proficiencies make sense and match the personality you've written? If you picture Sir Roderick as ugly and clumsy, don't assign him a high Charisma or Dexterity. After all, the average human ability score is 11, so while almost all PCs have some high scores, they should also have some low scores (9 and under) as well. Remember, perfection can be boring, and weaknesses can be fun to play.

Along the same lines, use common sense when determining character height and weight. Many authors underestimate the weight of characters, resulting in men and women who would be considered scrawny and anorexic for their height. Since muscle weighs more than fat, you should never see (as I once did in a game) a 5′6″ female warrior with a 17 Strength and 16 Constitution who weighed in at 110 lbs.! A more realistic figure might have been 130 lbs. or more.

Proficiencies are also incredibly important for rounding out and adding depth to a character. Interesting proficiencies (or their lack, such as a paladin who can't ride a horse) make a character more fun. If you use a proficiency that isn't in the *Player's Handbook*, detail it on the character sheet. Unusual languages are often good as well, but be careful not to overdo it. I recently played in a tournament where a fellow player looked at his character sheet and stated, "Yep, I'm just a good ol' farm boy turned guard, who happens to speak red dragon!"

I've also seen PCs who speak mind flayer—and who would teach them?—when it is usually considered a purely telepathic language. So, take a hard look at the logic of your characters, and make sure it makes sense.

One fun technique for improving characters is giving them unique or interesting items, or better yet tying their items to the adventure itself. In one memorable event by a Network author, the PCs needed a red filter to be able to read an important secret message. It was up to the players to figure out why their characters were carrying rubies. Make sure, however, that you fully describe any unusual items that you assign your characters. When thief characters in a recent tournament event were carrying sharkskin, most players and DMs alike didn't know what it could be used for.

When you assign magic items, use logic here as well. Never give characters game-busting items like a *staff of the magi* unless there is a really good, plot-driven reason for it. Remember as well never to give items like a *hammer of thunderbolts* that take all the challenge out of combat encounters. The best kind of magic to include somewhere in an adventuring party are items that offer role-playing hooks. Rude talking swords and *philters of love* are both good examples of this.

Completeness

Finally, check for completeness. This means double-check your accuracy when it comes to calculating THAC0s, alignment and racial restrictions, saving throw bonuses, weapon speed factors, and armor class. Then, when you're sure that every PC is perfect, give them to one of those friends who's memorized every rule book, and have him check the PCs as well. A lot of mistakes crop up when people forget to include all combat bonuses, or use incorrect weapon statistics, or forget that rings of protection and magical armor just don't mix well.

For thief characters, make sure the thief skills are accurate and adjusted for Dexterity, race and armor. For wizard characters, double-check the levels, power and game balance of their spell books, and list out all spells that the character has available. For priests, it is even more important to list every pertinent spell in every sphere that the priest has access to! Yes, this is a pain and it takes a while, but it is also essential, as it stops a player from having to delay the game while he or she digs through books to try and pick spells when everyone else at the table is ready and waiting to play.

Finally, check for typos and spelling mistakes. Even though most spell checkers usually choke on words like THAC0 or Evoker, it's worth running the spell check on your personality and interactions sections at the very least. When it finishes, rereading a printed copy can sometimes identify additional typos.

For some people, writing good characters is the hardest part of tournament writing. For others, characters come easily, and they struggle to write the main storyline instead.

Whichever type you are, you now have a few tips on crafting good characters that you might not have thought of before. Created by your imagination and brought to life by someone else's at a gaming convention, the characters are just half of your whole tournament . . . but they might be the more important half.

...SO THEY DON'T STINK by Kevin Kulp

Personalities of Note

A collection of NPCs from Ravens Bluff

This page offers a selection of personalities which judges are encouraged to use as background characters in adventures. Authors are encouraged to write them into adventures specifically as well. Recurring NPCs help create a feeling of continuity and community at the game table.

Captain Dominic Cuttler

7th Level Male Human Myrmidon (Fighter)

Height:	6' 3"
Weight:	191 lbs
Age:	37
Hair/Eyes:	Black/Blue
Alignment:	Lawful Neutral
Languages:	Common, Dwarven, Orc

Dominic Cuttler is the leader of a mercenary group that is part of the army now defending Ravens Bluff. His plate armor is always shiny and spotless, he always seems to be standing at attention, and he is notorious for charging into impossible situations and never retreating. "The greatest leaders never retreated," he is fond of saying. He likes to go into battle with a long sword in one hand, and a short sword in the other.

Dominic was born to a wealthy merchant couple in nearby Elturel. His childhood was plush and comfortable, and also boring—very, very boring. Although his father tried to get the boy onto the family gem business, Dominic showed no interest whatsoever. He spent most of his time as a boy leading a gang of friends, picking on the younger kids of lesser social status, committing acts of petty thievery and doing anything else he could imagine to liven things up a bit.

Dominic's life really didn't start, as far as he is concerned, until his parents sent him off to military school in hopes of channeling his high energy into more constructive areas. He has never been able to thank them enough for that decision. He loved it. He especially loved to spend hours poring over epic war poetry and military histories, skipping over any mention of defeat or retreat and reading the most heroic parts over and over. He graduated near the top of his class.

Since graduation, he has served in several campaigns and collected a band of tough, loyal mercenaries who will follow him anywhere. High military discipline is maintained within the group at all times, and any sign of weakness or threat to Cuttler's position of authority is dealt with most severely.

Cuttler and his men always volunteer for the missions no one else wants to take. Cuttler will allow others to come along on these suicide runs, if they think they're brave enough, but the mortality rate for these adventurers is quite high. This doesn't really bother the captain, as he has little regard for outsiders. Obviously if an adventurer can't take care of himself, that man didn't belong with his elite group in the first place. However, if someone survives a few missions with him, and respects his chain of command, he may consider allowing them to join in his quest for glory.

He sees the battle for Ravens Bluff as his big opportunity for distinction and he's not going to waste it. He wants the accolades and respect he has dreamed of all his life, and he wants it NOW. He will allow no one, not even ultimately his own men, to stand in his way.

— by Erica Woollums

Noah

3rd Level Male Half-elf Rogue

Height:	5' 1"
Weight:	92 lbs.
Age:	26
Hair/Eyes:	Light Brown/Hazel
Alignment:	Chaotic Neutral
Languages:	Common, Elven

Noah is a vandal. Perhaps he is simply misunderstood, yet he is proving costly to the city. Noah drifted in from the north just before the war began. Not the type to believe in war, Noah set about spreading messages of peace and love. He lost his family during a senseless war over land. Since that time, he has traveled the Realms searching for freedom from power struggles and battle. His only weapon is a paintbrush.

Without regard for others' property, he paints his opinion for all to see. No edifice within the city is safe. His brightly colored, exotic, and elaborate works of art currently demonstrate the uselessness of war and the tragedies of combat. Most citizens might agree, but with the city under attack and no peace in sight, Noah's pictures merely enhance the desperate feeling of the populace.

Noah is adept at disguise and has so far moved about the city freely. The Watch has been too busy to spend resources on him despite pressure from higher authorities. Some officials have suggested that he is an agent of Zhentil Keep, sent to demoralize the troops and the citizens to aid in the takeover. Others are merely amused by his talented efforts. The Bard's Guild is reputedly looking to recruit him, but he remains aloof.

— by Sherrie Miller

Wanted: Classified Ads from RPGA® Network members. Advertise your gaming group, your old product to sell or trade, or your desire to find a gaming group. Send submissions by U.S. Mail or email to the addresses on page 2.

Classifieds...

Conventions

Featuring Network Sanctioned Tournaments

WESTERN CHALLENGE 97
When: Oct 17–19 **Where:** University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
What's Happening: Lots of role-playing
Cost: Contact organizer
Contact: Western Challenge, Rob Forsyth, 423 Montreal Ave. S, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7M 3L2 Canada

KENNEL CON '97
When: Oct 25–26 **Where:** Kaala Recreation Center, Schoefield Barracks, HI
What's Happening: LIVING CITY and LIVING DEATH events
Cost: Contact organizer
Contact: Eric Kline, P.O. Box 90182, Honolulu HI 96835-0182.
Email: hirpga@aol.com

M.A.C.E. 97
When: Nov 7–9 **Where:** Holiday Inn High Point, High Point, NC
What's Happening: Nine all-new RPGA events, including 3 new LIVING CITY events.
Cost: Contact organizer
Contact: Sherrie Masdon, 1998 Randon Drive, Greensboro NC 27407.
Email: sherriearc@aol.com

PENTACON 14
When: Nov 14–16 **Where:** Grand Wayne Center, Fort Wayne, IN
What's Happening: RPGs, board games, miniatures, auction, RPGA events, more. Guests: Lester Smith and Aaron Allston. FREE SODA all weekend!
Cost: Contact organizer
Contact: Rex Joyner, 2917 Westbrook #108, Fort Wayne IN 46805

PURPLE DRAGON
When: Oct 17–19 **Where:** University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario
What's Happening: RPGA® LIVING CITY™ events.
Cost: Contact organizer
Contact: Malcolm Wood, Box 764, West Lorne, Ontario N0l 2P0 Canada

WATSFIC 97
When: Nov 15–16 **Where:** Engineering Lecture Hall, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario
What's Happening: RPGA LIVING CITY Events
Cost: Contact organizer
Contact: Vince Garofalo, 27 Jacob Drive, Whitby, Ontario L1P 1A9 Canada

BOGGLECON 6
When: Oct 18 **Where:** Wind Gap Legion Hall, Wind Gap, PA
What's Happening: RPGA LIVING CITY
Contact: Michael Griffith, 118 S. Broadway, Wind Gap PA 18091

DANCON 5
When: Oct 30–Nov 2 **Where:** Atlanta, GA
What's Happening: LIVING CITY and LIVING DEATH events
Cost: Contact organizer
Contact: Dan Donnelly, 2250 Lexington Way, Kennesaw GA 30144.
Email: rdravens@aol.com

SCICON 19
When: Nov 7–9 **Where:** Holiday Inn Executive Center, Virginia Beach, VA
What's Happening: RPGA and other role-playing, plus other neat stuff
Cost: Contact organizer
Contact: Mark Schaeffer, P.O. Box 9434, Hampton VA 23670.
Email: gaming@scicon.org

RAVENS BLUFF REVISITED
When: Nov 20–23 **Where:** Princeton Motel-Hotel, Princeton, NJ
What's Happening: LIVING CITY and LIVING DEATH events
Cost: Contact organizer
Contact: James White, 3 Foursome Drive, Marlboro NJ 07746

FANTASY QUEST II
When: Oct 24–26 **Where:** O'Bannon Community Center, Buffalo, MO
What's Happening: RPGA events, other role-playing
Cost: Contact organizer
Contact: Gamers Association of Mid-America, Jeff Fox, 2436 Fall Creek Road, Apt. #4, Branson MO 65616

GEO CON '97
LIVING Campaign events (LIVING CITY, LIVING DEATH, *Virtual Seattle*) at four locations across the country.

Nov 14-16
Minneapolis, MN
Erik Mona, 6328 Timber Trail, Edina, MN 55439
iquander@aol.com

Nov 21-23
Atlanta, GA
George Aber
geoabear@aol.com

Nov 21-23
Fairmont, WV
George Fulda
1 Timothy Lane #D2
Fairmont, WV 26554
wvrpga@aol.com

Nov 28-30
Toronto, Ontario
George Coursey
67 Woodward Ave.
Thornhill, Ontario
L3T 1E8 Canada

GEN CON® 1997 Game Fair RPGA® Network Pinnacle Event Winners

Due to some technical difficulties, we were unable to announce the Pinnacle Event winners at the Game Fair. We apologize, and present them here. Congratulations on a job well done.

Best Heroic Fantasy Player
Klim Altman

Best Heroic Fantasy Judge
David Kelman

Best Heroic Sci-Fi Player
Donald Bingle

Best Heroic Sci-Fi Judge
Benjamin Zarit

Best Horror Player
Craig Walker

Best Horror Judge
Karen Gunderson

Top LIVING™ Campaign Player
George Vellella, Jr.

Top LIVING Campaign Judge
Daniel Donnelly

Network Club Challenge Winner
1st—The Company of the Framed Adventurers (2nd year in a row)
2nd—DOGS
3rd—Clan Yeoman

Top Overall Player
Qualifiers had to play a minimum of 5 events. Here are the top five.
1st—Doug Rosson (avg. 25.17 in 6 events)
2nd—Sholom West (avg. 23.74 in 7 events)
3rd—Saul Resnikoff (avg. 22.51 in 7 events)
4th—Don Weatherbee (avg. 22.06 in 7 events)
5th—Klim Altman (avg. 21.93 in 8 events)

Top Overall Judge
Qualifiers had to judge at least 7 events. Here are the top five.
1st—Daniel Donnelly (avg. 176.5 in 8 events)
2nd—Tom Prusa (avg. 169.5 in 10 events)
3rd—Vic Polites (avg. 160.3 in 8 events)
4th—David Kelman (avg. 158.0 in 8 events)
5th—Karen Gunderson (avg. 154.0 in 7 events)

Thanks again to everyone who worked so hard to make this year's program a success, especially Cheryl, Troy, Willie, and Tom, without whom I would have gone crazy. — Robert Wiese

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Gaming:	3 pm to 6:45 pm
RPGA Meeting:	7 pm to 8:50 pm
Gaming:	9 pm to 12:45 am

Friday and Saturday

Gaming:	8 am to 11:45 am
Seminars:	Noon to 12:50 pm
	1 pm to 1:50 pm
Break:	2 pm to 2:50 pm
Gaming:	3 pm to 6:45 pm
Seminars:	7 pm to 7:50 pm
	8 pm to 8:50 pm
Gaming:	9 pm to 12:45 am

Sunday

Gaming:	8 am to 11:45 am
Seminars:	Noon to 12:50 pm
Awards Lunch:	1:30 pm
Awards Ceremony:	2:30 pm

I am coming to WINTER FANTASY!

Name: _____ RPGA # _____

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❑ Sign me up for the RPGA Judge Training Program

- **Work minimum of 16 hours and qualify for free admission****
- **Work minimum of 36 hours and qualify for free space in a quad room****

** Subject to availability

Fees:

$25	Early Bird on or before Nov. 1, 1997* (save $10)
$30	Pre-reg (save $5 over the at-the-door rate)
$35	At the door
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• Date listed is the postmark date; pre-registrations should be postmarked no later than five days after this date. Not responsible for late, lost, or damaged mail.

Circle "J" for the games you want to judge, and "P" for the games you want to play.

	Thursday		Friday			Saturday			Sunday	
Times	3pm	9pm	8am	3pm	9pm	8am	3pm	9pm	8am	3 pm
Slots	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
AD&D® Feature (2-round)	J or P	J or P	J or P	J or P	J or P	J or P		JF	JF	
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AD&D Special		J or P			J or P		J or P		J or P	
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AD&D Team Challenge (2-round) ++[$15 per club]				J or P			J or P		JF	
LIVING CITY™ Benefit				J or P			J or P	J or P		
LIVING CITY Feature	J or P		J or P		J or P	J or P				
LIVING CITY Judge Only Special									J or P	
LIVING DEATH™ Enigma			J or P					J or P		
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LIVING JUNGLE™ Challenge		J or P		J or P					J or P	
ALTERNITY™ Science Fiction Game		J or P	J or P			J or P			J or P	
DRAGONLANCE®: FIFTH AGE® Game	J or P		J or P					J or P		
Earthdawn Game					J or P					
Shadowrun Virtual Seattle		J or P		J or P		J or P				
Mystery Game	J or P					J or P				
Star Wars Game	J or P				J or P		J or P			
Men in Black (D6 System)								J or P		
Network/Convention Volunteer	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V

++ To register for the club event, a club officer should send $15 along with the club name, the names of the players and the slot desired. Players should not register individually for this event.

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- A live-action Star Wars mini-adventure!
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